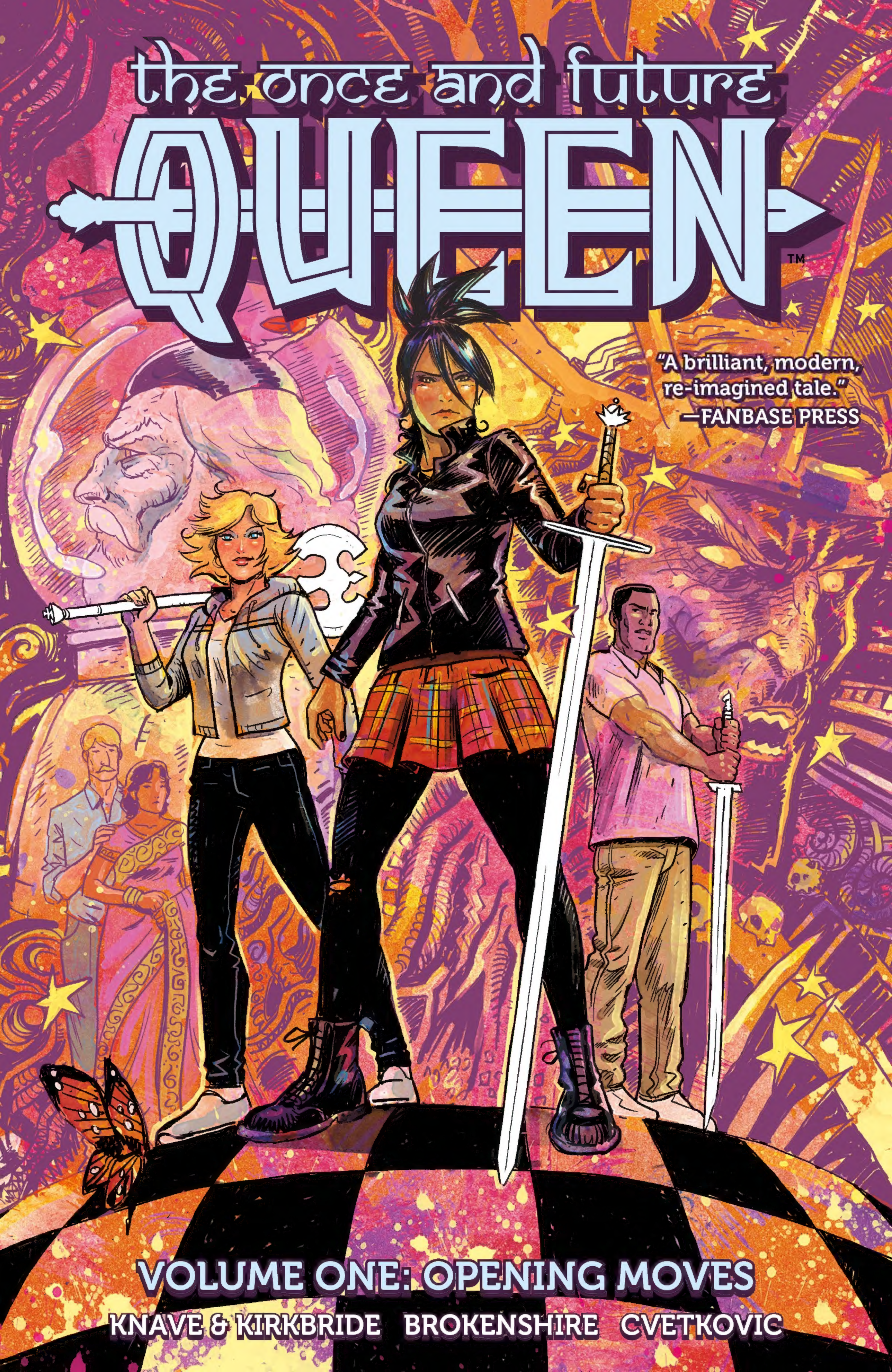
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VOLUME ONE: OPENING MOVES
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the once and future QUEEN™

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STORY BY
Adam P. Knave and D.J. Kirkbride

ART AND COVER BY
Nick Brokenshire

LETTERS AND LOGO DESIGN BY
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This volume collects *The Once and Future Queen* #1–#5.

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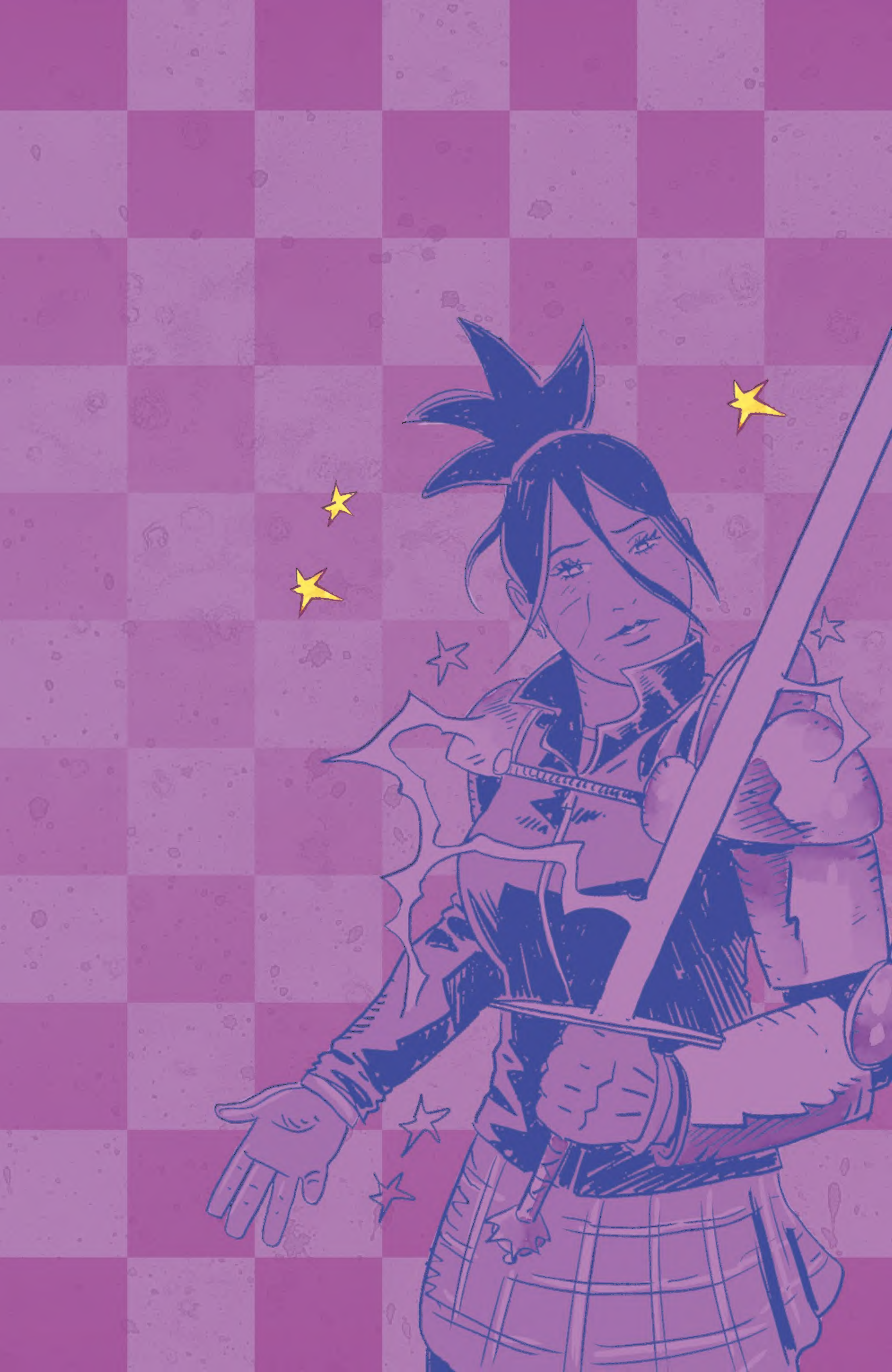
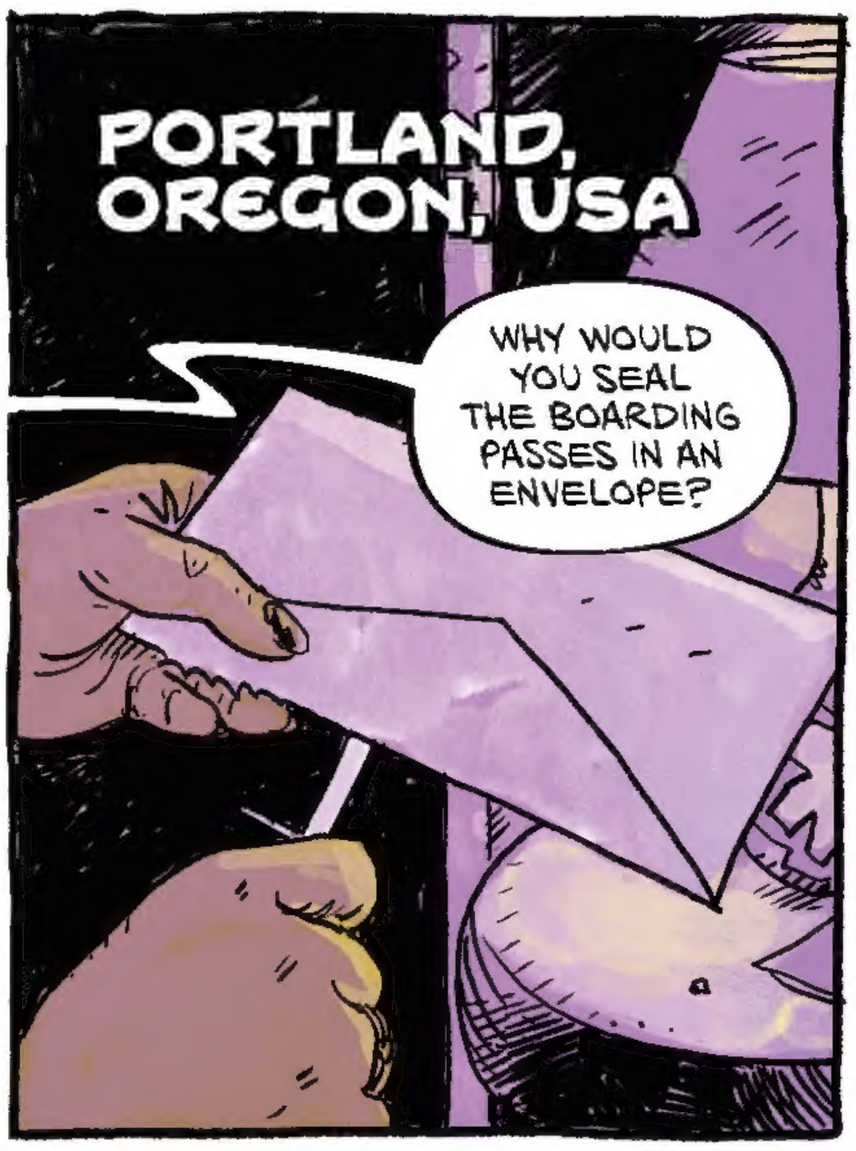
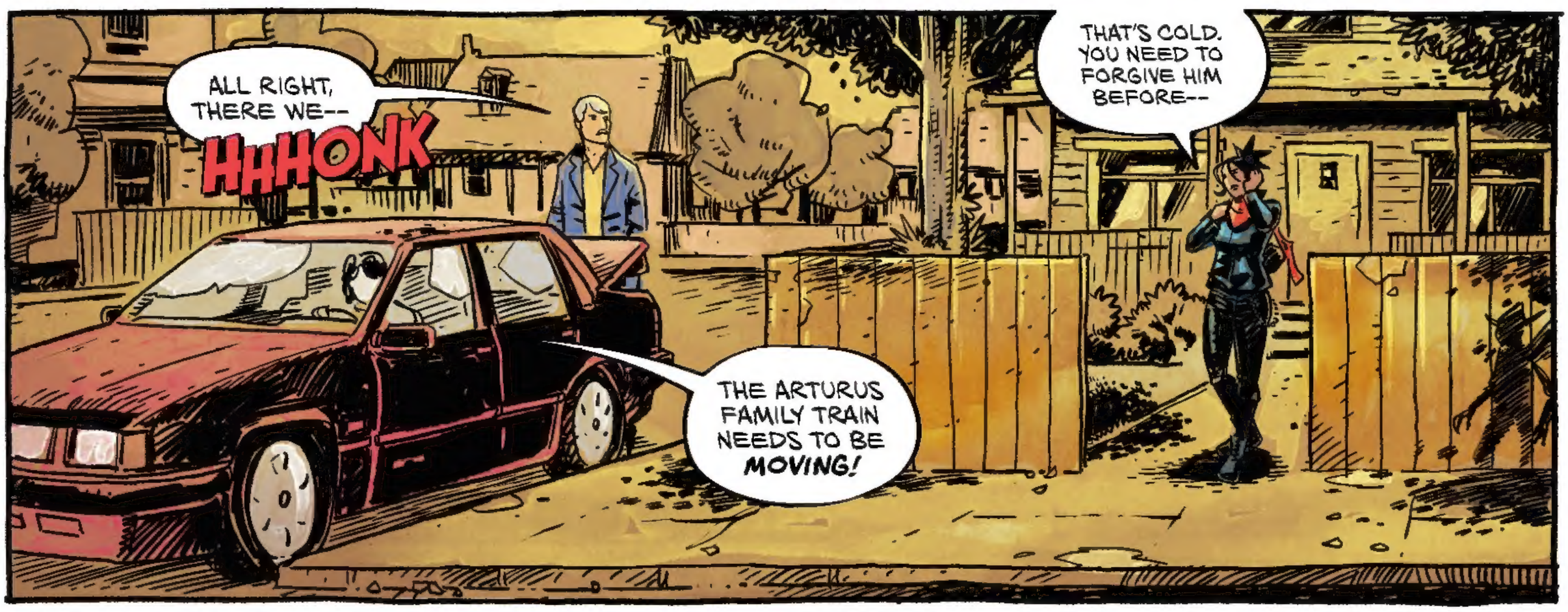
CHAPTER ONE




PORTLAND, OREGON, USA
WHY WOULD YOU SEAL THE BOARDING PASSES IN AN ENVELOPE?

SO WE WOULDN'T LOSE THEM. NOW, WHERE ARE MY GLASSES?
ON YOUR HEAD. CAN YOU HELP ME CLOSE THIS, DAD?
YOU CAN'T *FIT* THAT MANY BOOKS, RANI, UNLESS YOUR CARRY-ON'S BIGGER ON THE INSIDE.

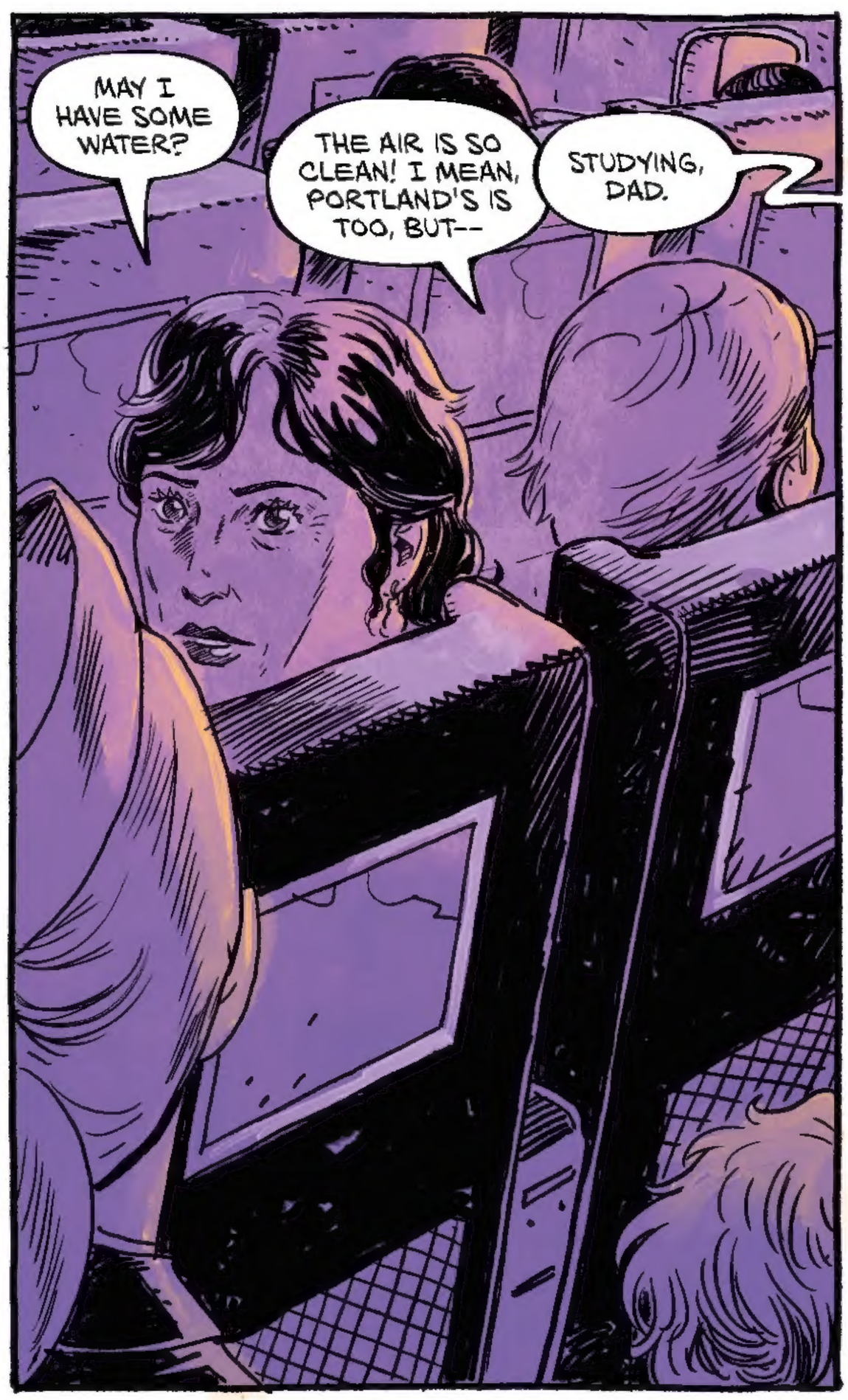

ALL RIGHT, THERE WE--
HHHONK
THE ARTURUS FAMILY TRAIN NEEDS TO BE *MOVING!*
THAT'S COLD. YOU NEED TO FORGIVE HIM BEFORE--

EXCALIBUR COMICS
HEY-O! WATCH IT!
DAMN! NEXT TIME WE CAB!

YEAH, I FEEL *REALLY* SECURE NOW.

SORRY! SORRY!
WE WERE JUST ABOUT TO CLOSE THE--
YES, OF COURSE, SORRY.

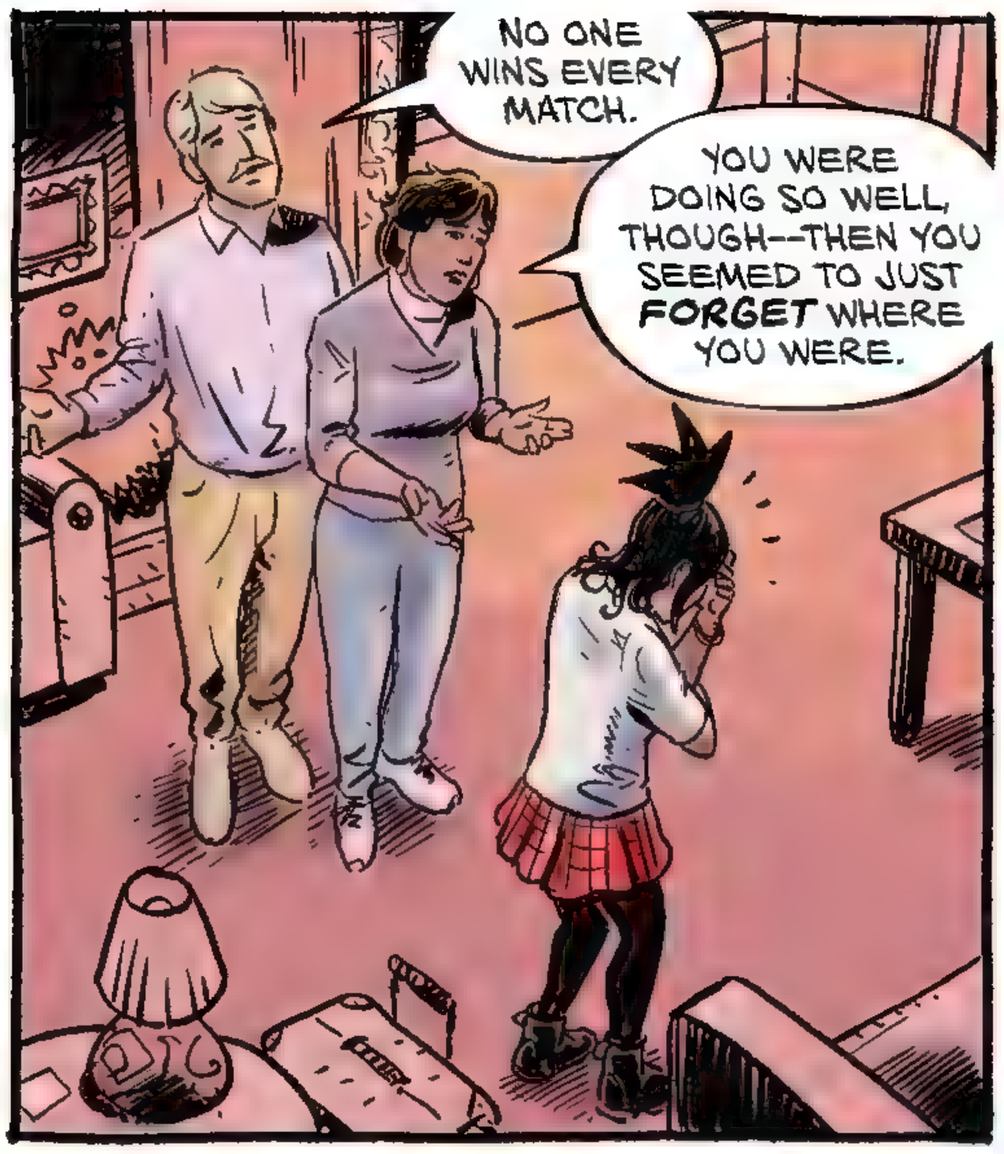
I HATE FLYING.
YOU'LL LOVE CORNWALL, RAN!! IT'S GORGEOUS. WHEN I WAS A KID--
SOUNDS GREAT, BUT I NEED TO STUDY.

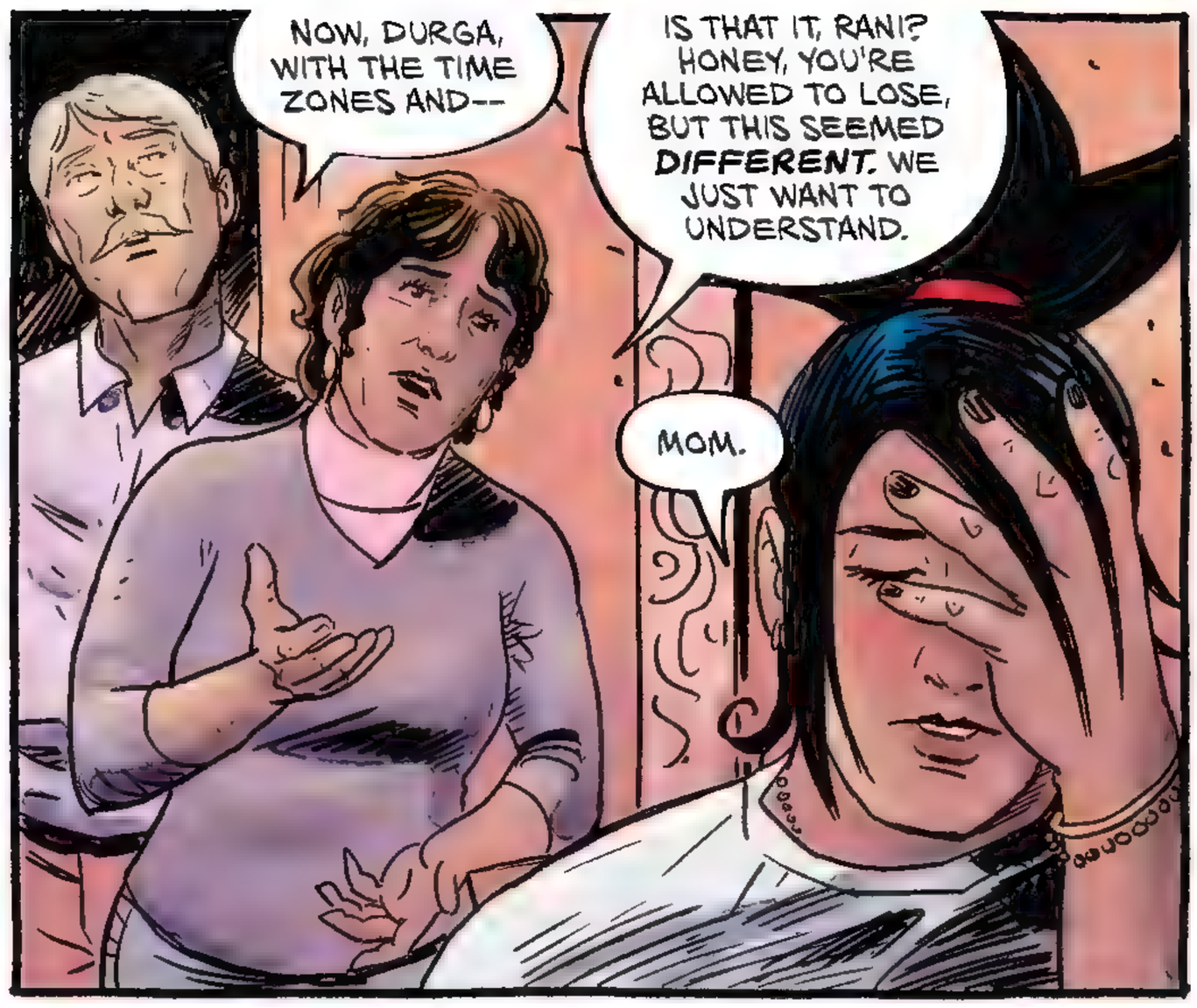

MAY I HAVE SOME WATER?
THE AIR IS SO CLEAN! I MEAN, PORTLAND'S IS TOO, BUT--
STUDYING, DAD.

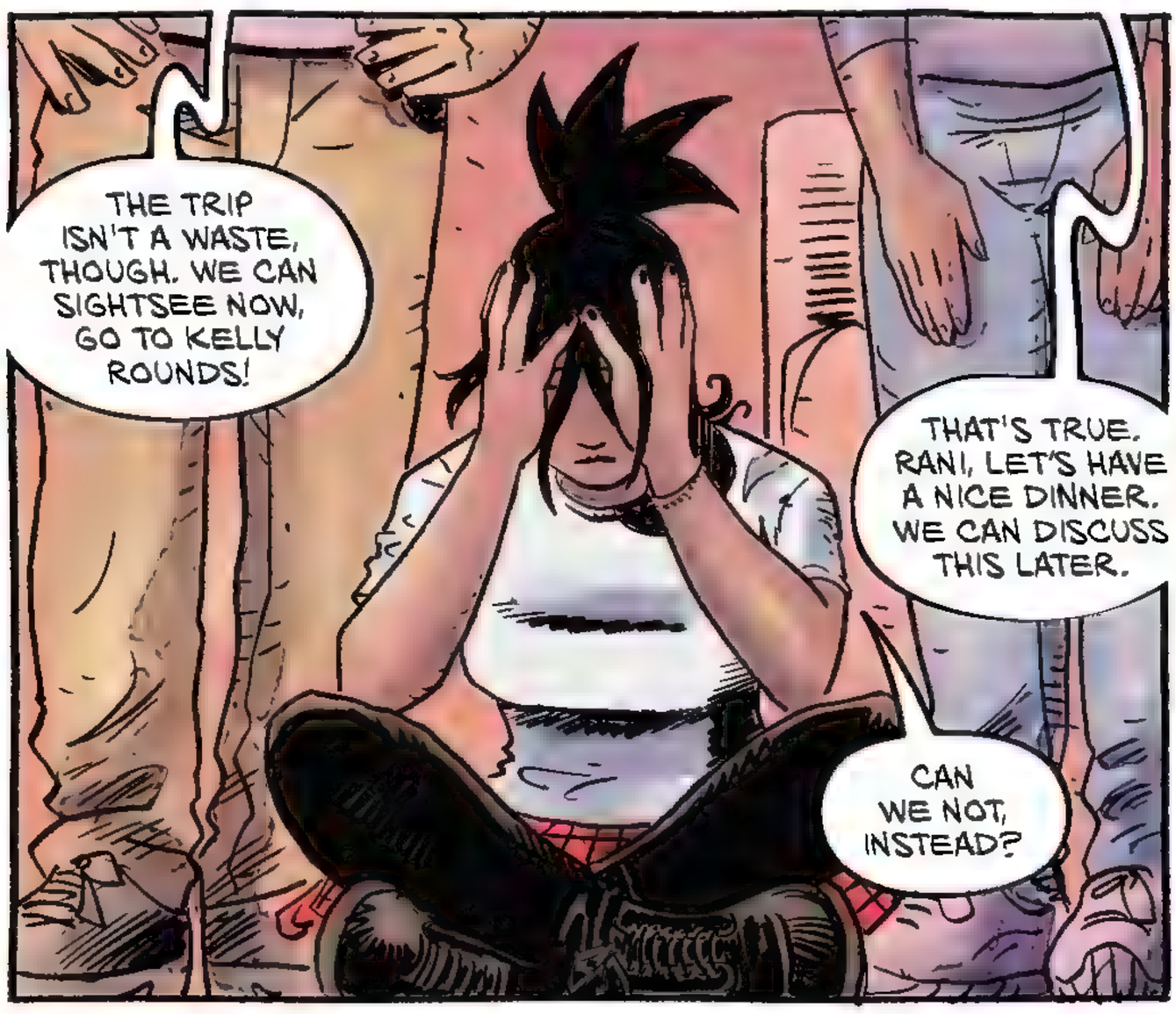
IF THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT WORKS, MAYBE I CAN PIVOT TO A TORRE ATTACK--BUT DIALLO LOVES AN ALEKHINE'S DEFENSE TO OPEN...
♫ When they kick at your front door how you gonna come? ♫

THESE PILLS AREN'T WORKING, WILLIAM.
DURGA, LOVE, GIVE IT A BIT. WE'VE TWELVE HOURS YET.
REMINDING ME OF THAT DOESN'T HELP.

CORNWALL, ENGLAND
CHESS TOURNAMENT
MATCH TO RANI ARTURUS.
GOOD GAME, ROBINSON. YOU ALMOST HAD ME.
HOW'D YOU REVERSE THE DEFENSE?
TRADE SECRET.
YOU GOT THIS, ARTURUS. JUST STOP LOOKING AT THAT GIRL.
WHO'D WANT TO STOP, THOUGH? DAMN IT, FOCUS! I CAN TAKE HIM.
WHOA. SHE JUST SMILED AT ME.
I CAN STILL SAVE THIS. FOCUS! CHRIST. STOP MOONING OVER SOMEONE YOU'LL NEVER SEE AGAIN.
ARTURUS
HEH.
MATCH TO KALU DIALLO.
I...GOOD MATCH, DIALLO.
ALMOST HAD ME, RANI. ALMOST.
YOU BLEW IT, ARTURUS. THE WHOLE TRIP WASTED. DAY ONE!
GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I SCREAM.


NO ONE WINS EVERY MATCH.
YOU WERE DOING SO WELL, THOUGH--THEN YOU SEEMED TO JUST FORGET WHERE YOU WERE.


NOW, DURGA, WITH THE TIME ZONES AND--
IS THAT IT, RANI? HONEY, YOU'RE ALLOWED TO LOSE, BUT THIS SEEMED DIFFERENT. WE JUST WANT TO UNDERSTAND.
MOM.


THE TRIP ISN'T A WASTE, THOUGH. WE CAN SIGHTSEE NOW, GO TO KELLY ROUNDS!
THAT'S TRUE. RANI, LET'S HAVE A NICE DINNER. WE CAN DISCUSS THIS LATER.
CAN WE NOT, INSTEAD?

I KNOW I LOST, ALL RIGHT? AN EXPENSIVE, TRAVEL-TO-ENGLAND LOSS.
NO, NO, SWEETHEART, YOU--

I JUST NEED SOME TIME.
RANI...
ALONE.

SHE'LL BE FINE. BACK SOON, I'M SURE.
STOP BEING SO CALM AND...AND BRITISH. I WORRY SHE TAKES THIS ALL TOO SERIOUSLY.

"REMINDS ME OF A CERTAIN AMERICAN I MARRIED."

DAD WASN'T WRONG--THIS PLACE IS **BEAUTIFUL.** FEELS LIKE HOME INSTANTLY.

♫ They're piling in the back seat! They're generating steam heat! ♫

THAT GIRL. I MEAN, YEAH, SHE WAS PRETTY--BUT I'D SWEAR I'VE **SEEN** HER BEFORE, WITH...LONGER HAIR, MAYBE? A DRESS? OH, WHO CARES, ARTURUS?

NEVER SEEN HER BEFORE, WON'T AGAIN. NEED TO STOP BLAMING HER FOR BLOWING IT.

I LET MYSELF GET DISTRACTED.

IT WAS **MY** FAULT.

MAYBE I JUST HIT THE WALL. MAYBE CHESS ISN'T **EVERYTHING.**

SHIT, IF THAT'S TRUE, WHAT ELSE DO I **HAVE?**

AM I EVEN QUALIFIED FOR ANYTHING ELSE? NOT THAT CHESS IS A **JOB,** BUT...

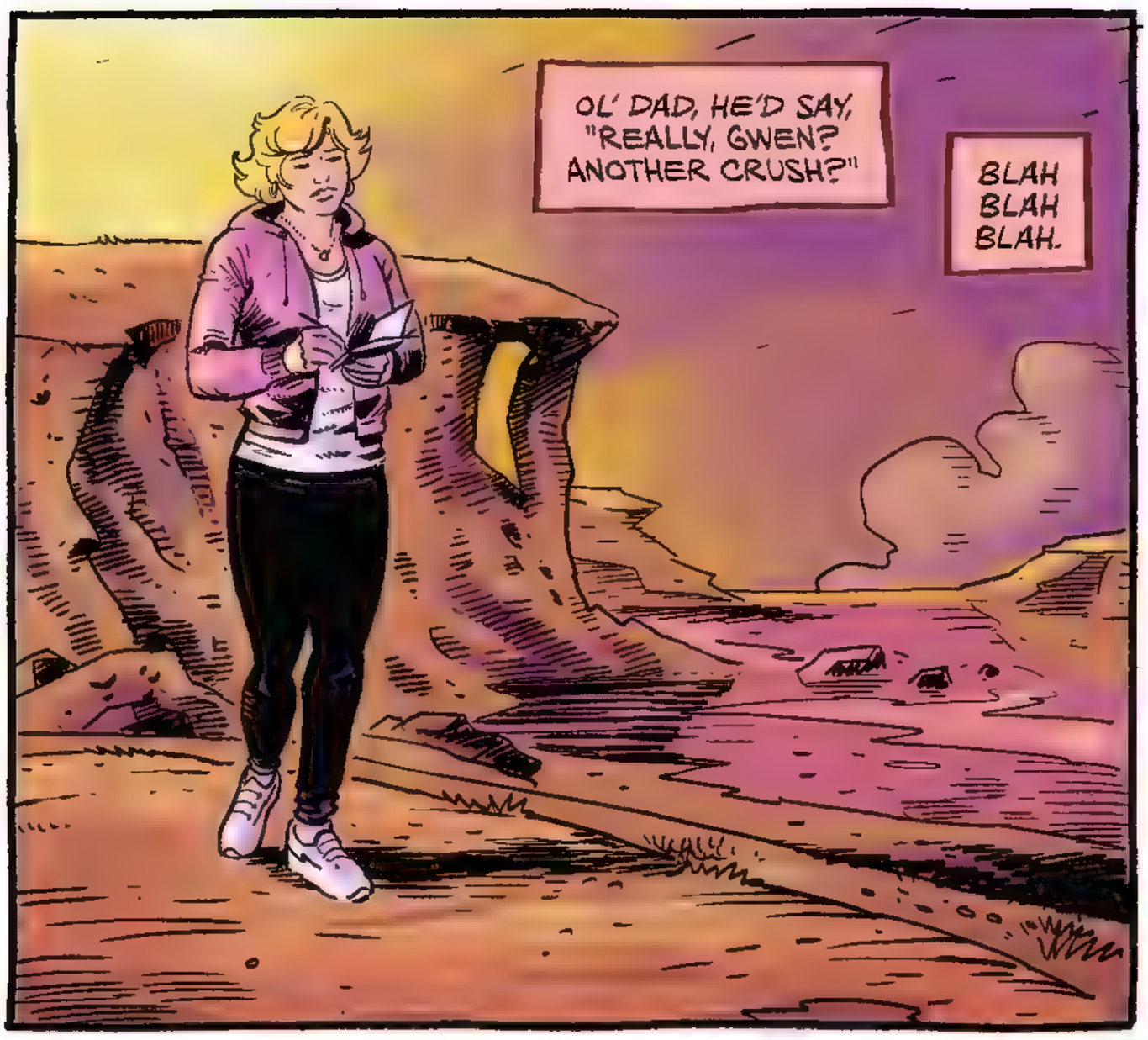
...WITHOUT CHESS, I DON'T EVEN KNOW.

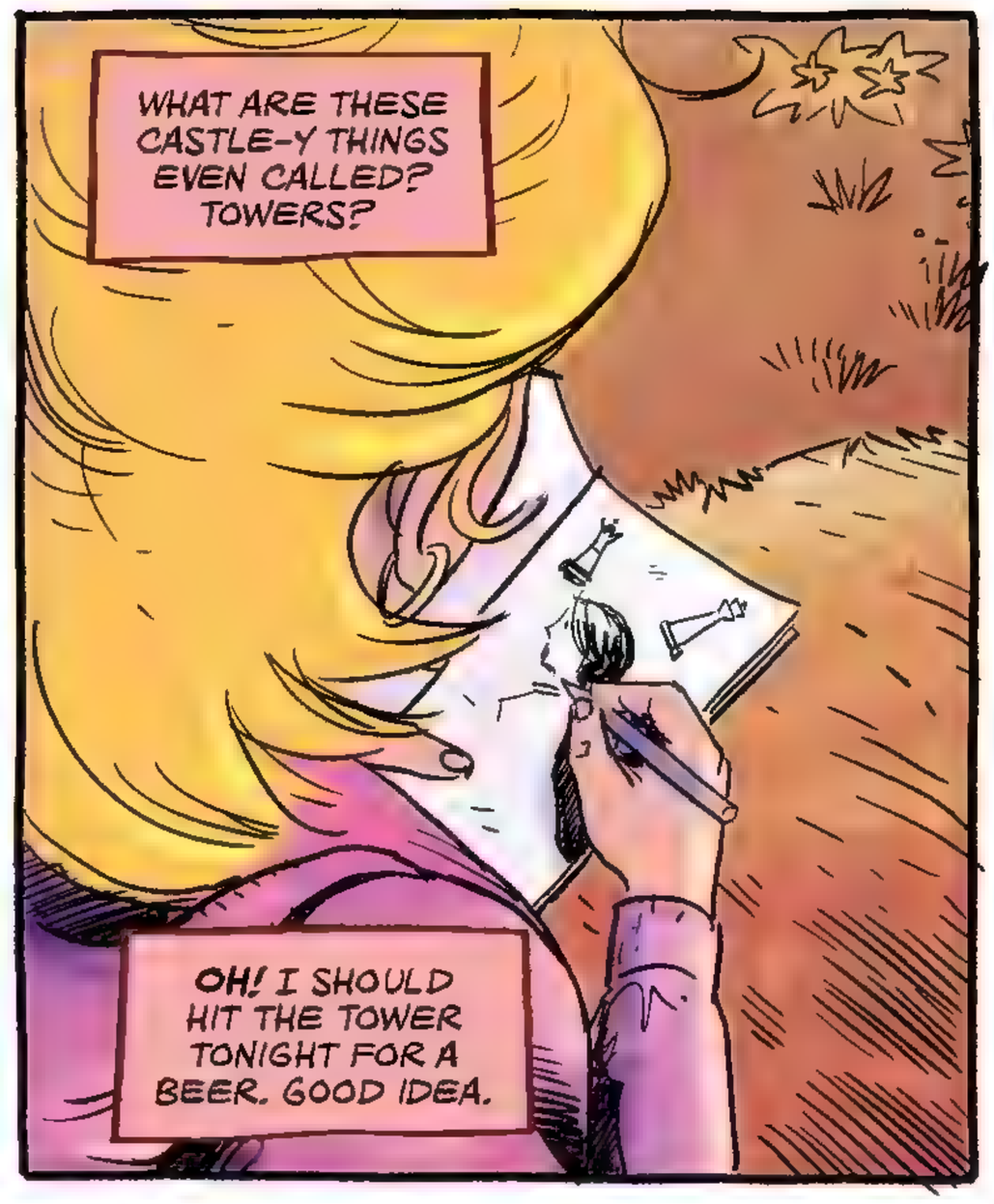
WHAT THE--?!

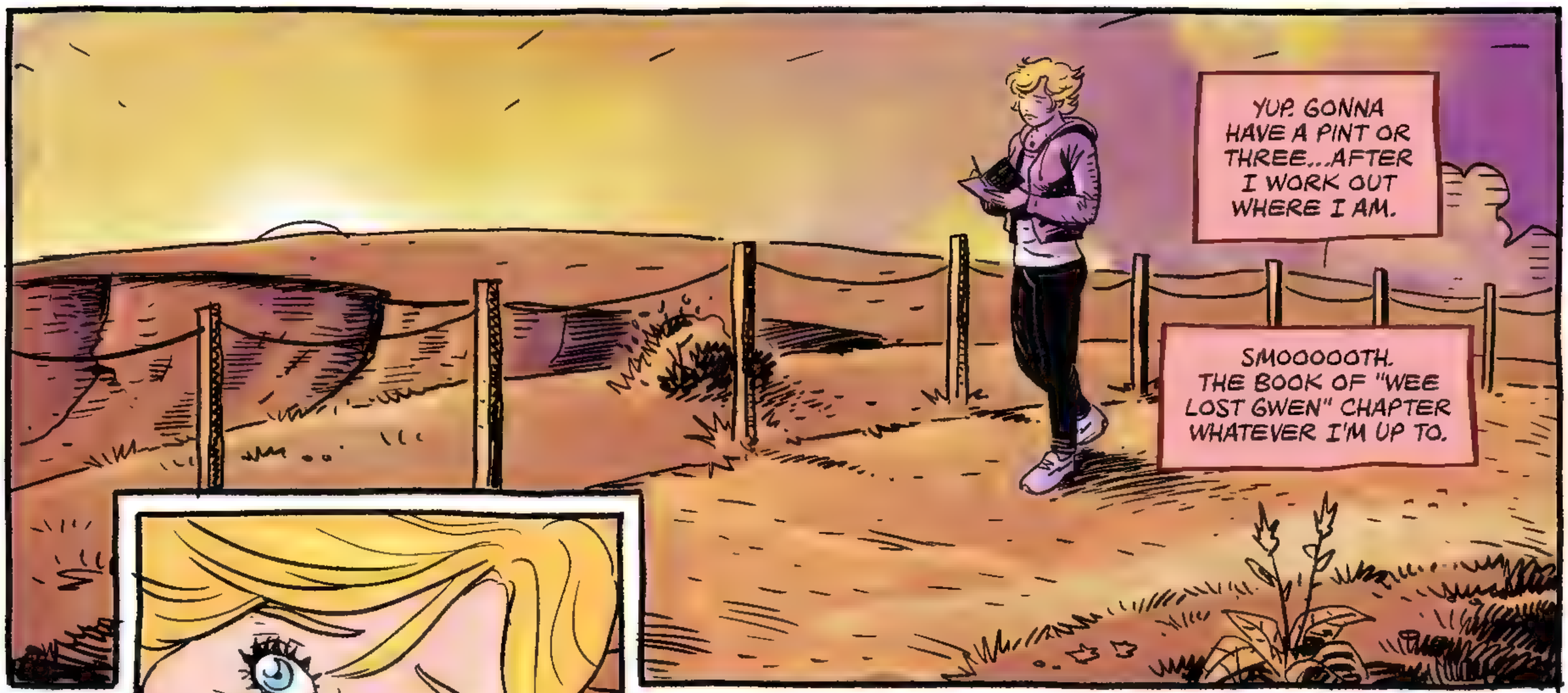
WASSA--?
SLIP
OOF!
ACK
THUD
OW...
KERFLOP

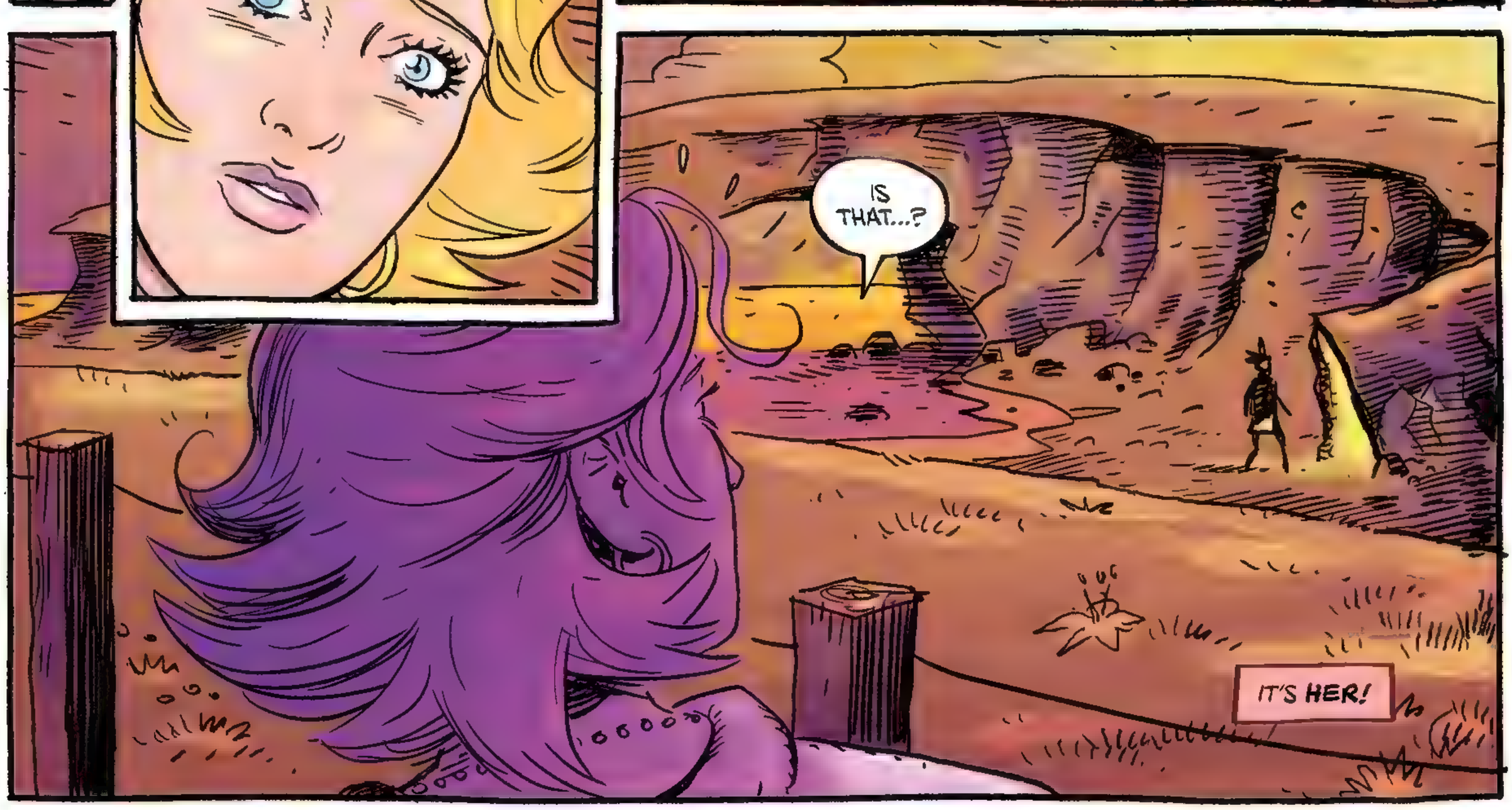
MAYBE WHOEVER'S IN THERE CAN HELP.

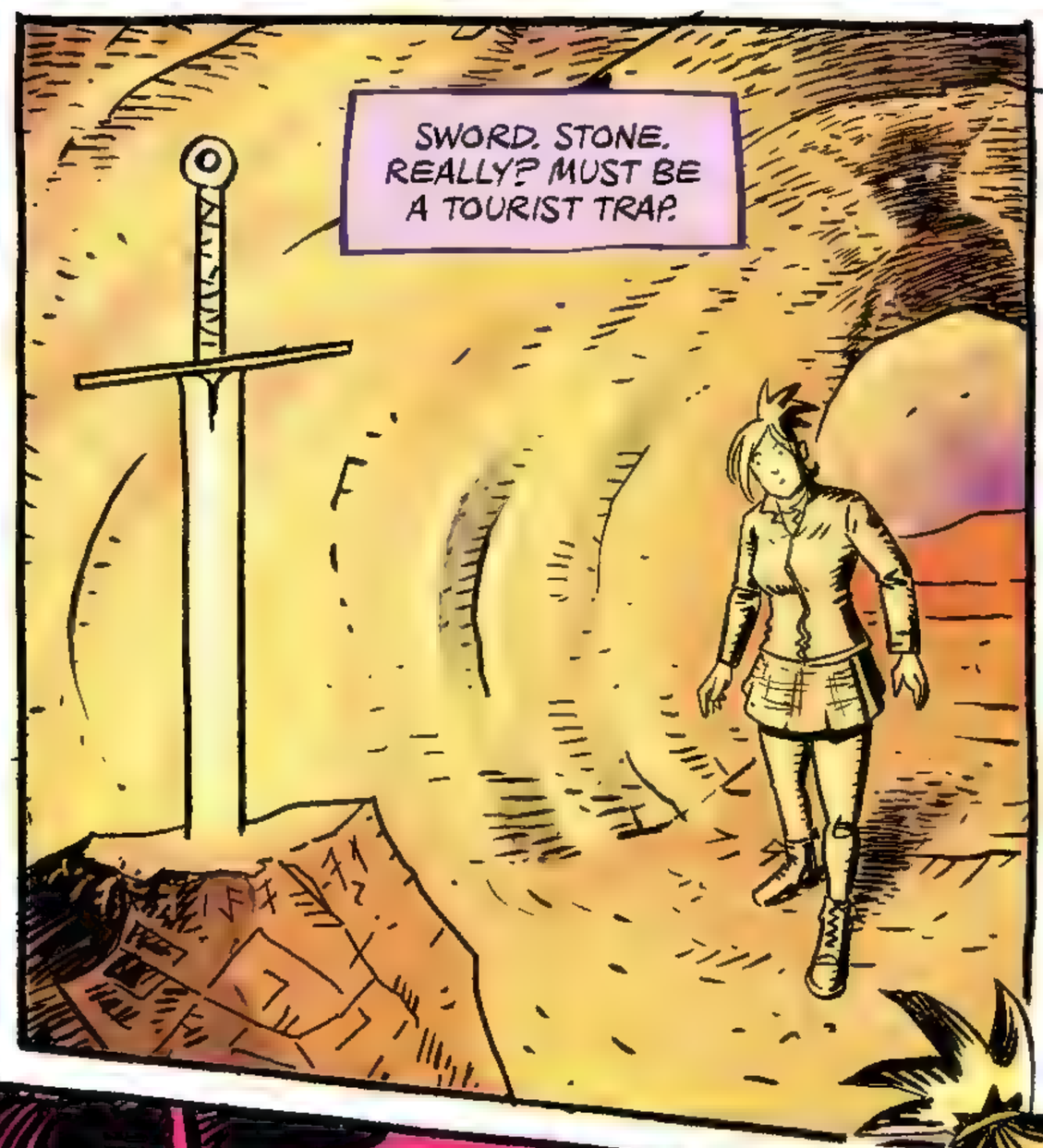
STRANGER IN A STRANGE CAVE IN A STRANGE LAND. WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

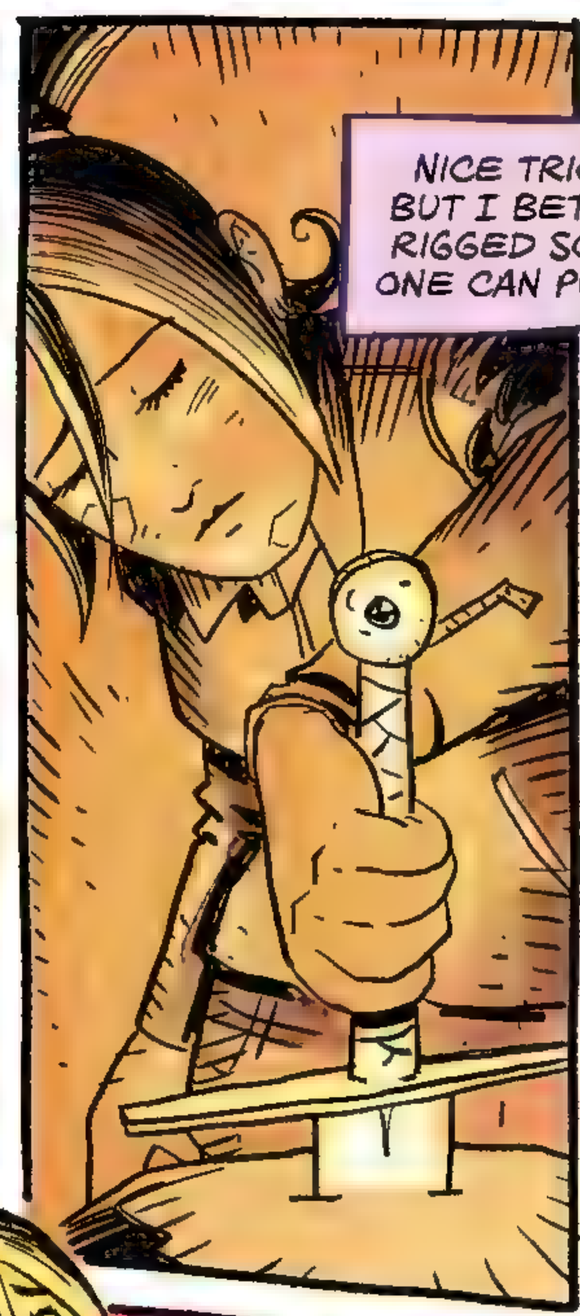

OL' DAD, HE'D SAY, "REALLY, GWEN? ANOTHER CRUSH?"
BLAH BLAH BLAH.

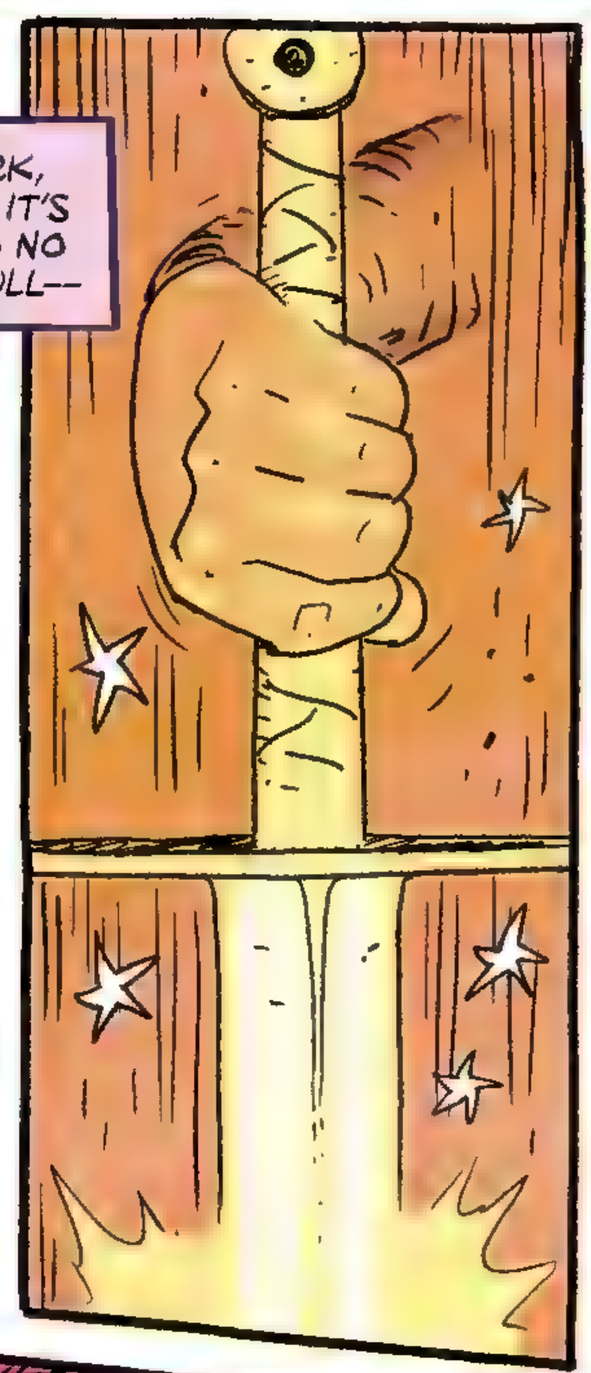

WHAT ARE THESE CASTLE-Y THINGS EVEN CALLED? TOWERS?
OH! I SHOULD HIT THE TOWER TONIGHT FOR A BEER. GOOD IDEA.


YUP. GONNA HAVE A PINT OR THREE...AFTER I WORK OUT WHERE I AM.
SMOOOOOTH. THE BOOK OF "WEE LOST GWEN" CHAPTER WHATEVER I'M UP TO.


IS THAT...?
IT'S HER!





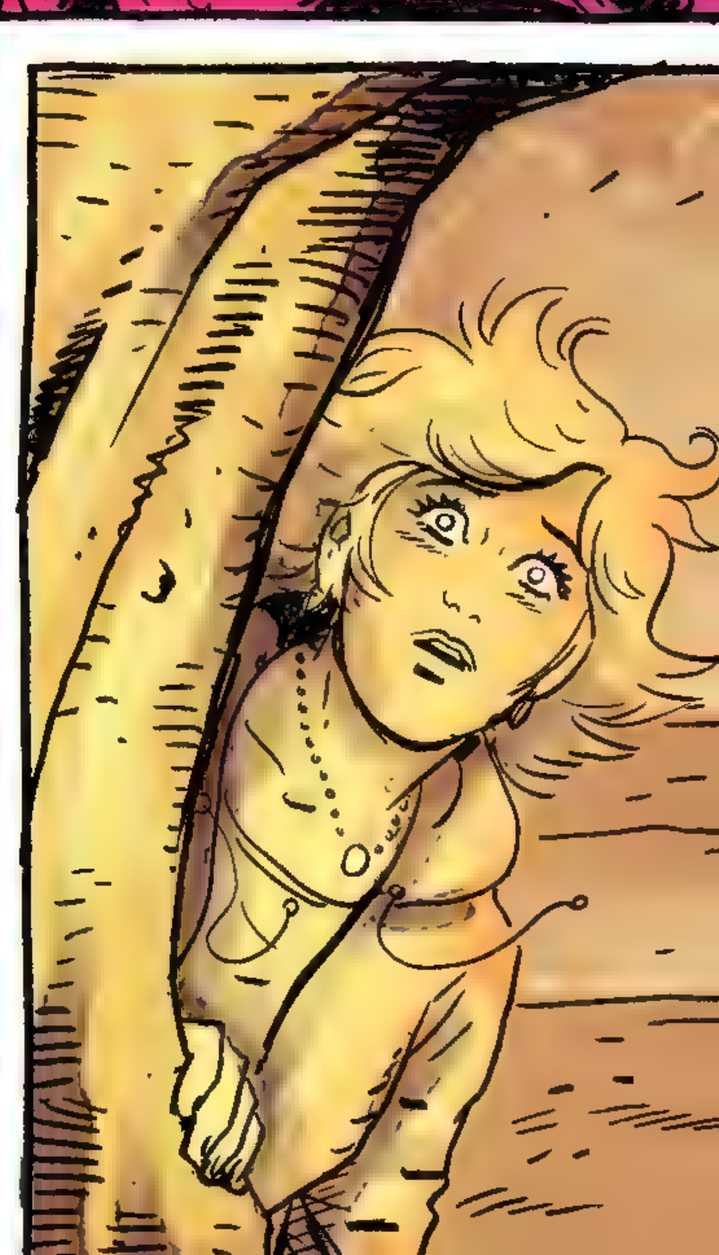


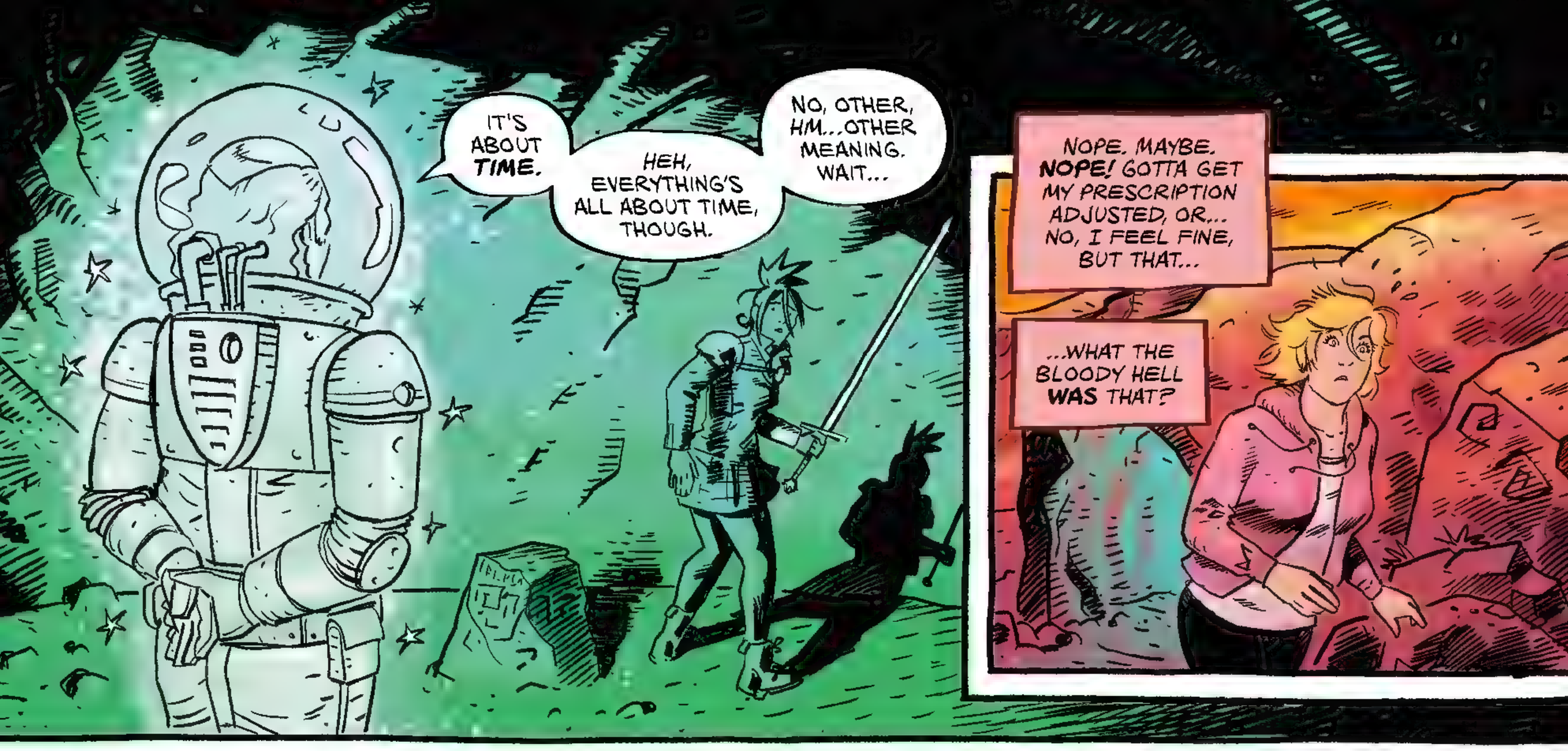
THE BETRAYAL...

...BUT I LOVE YOU...

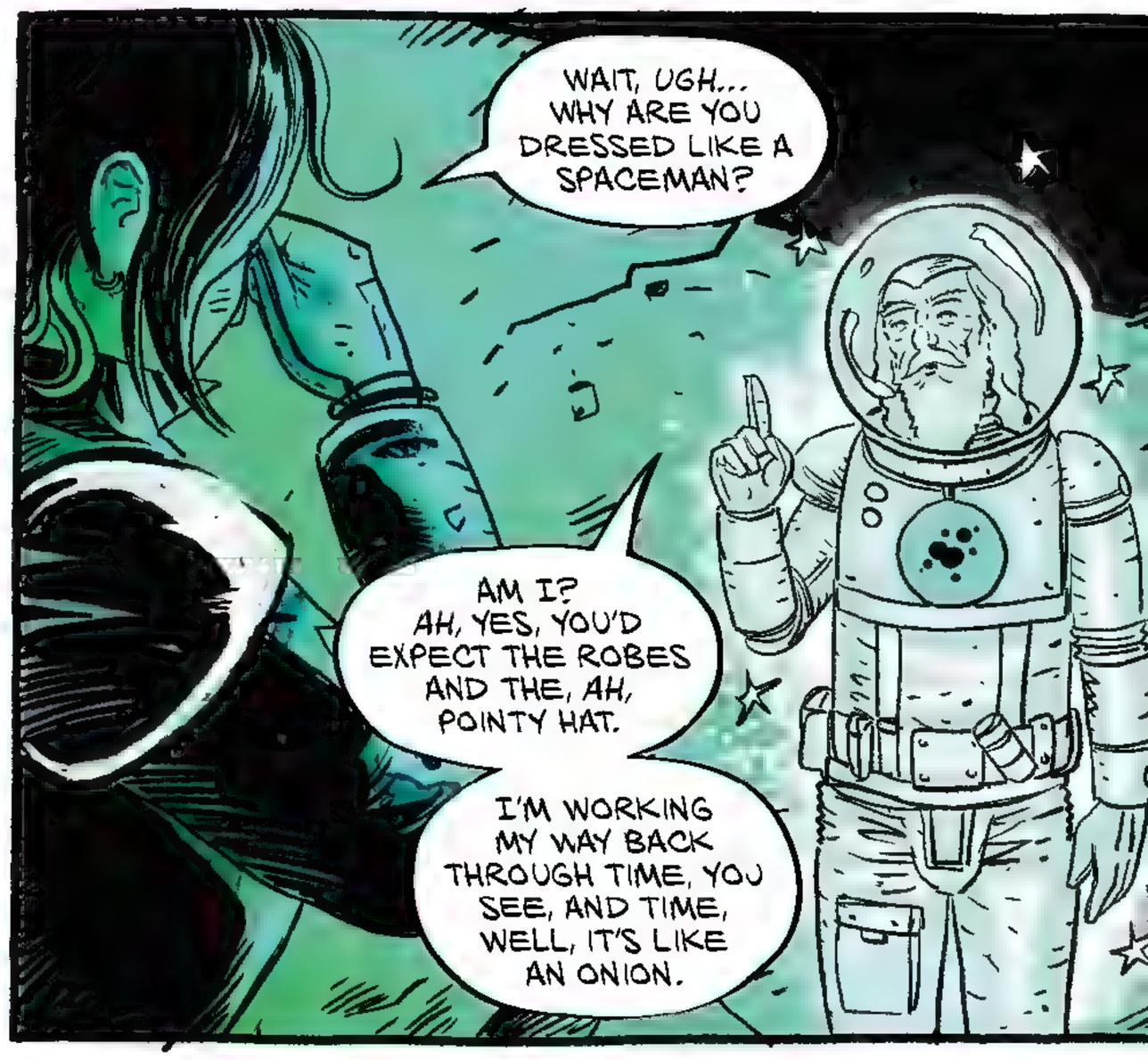
STEP ASIDE, YOU SCHEMING ***BITCH!***

THE LADY ***ALWAYS PLANS,*** SIRE.

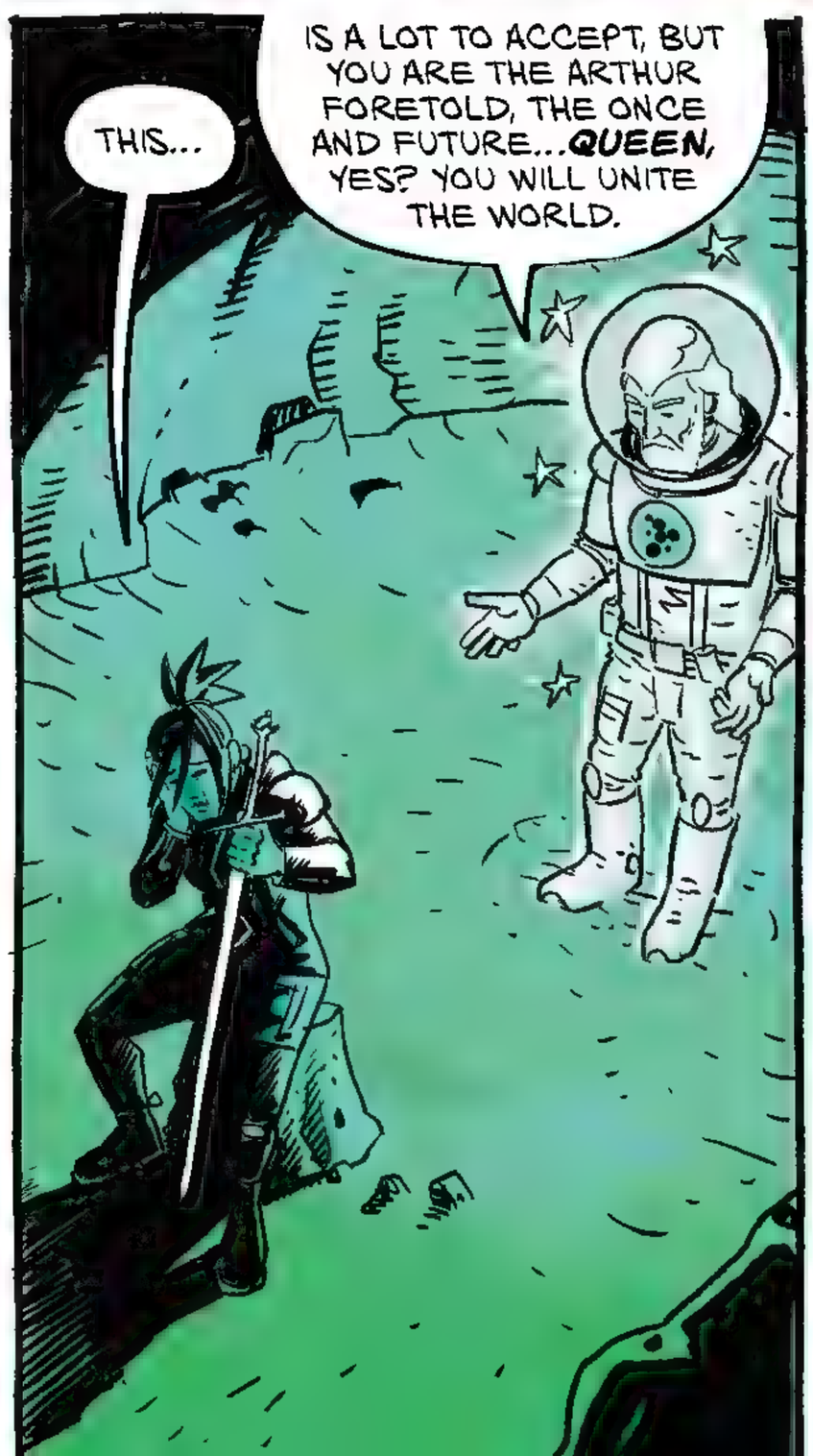


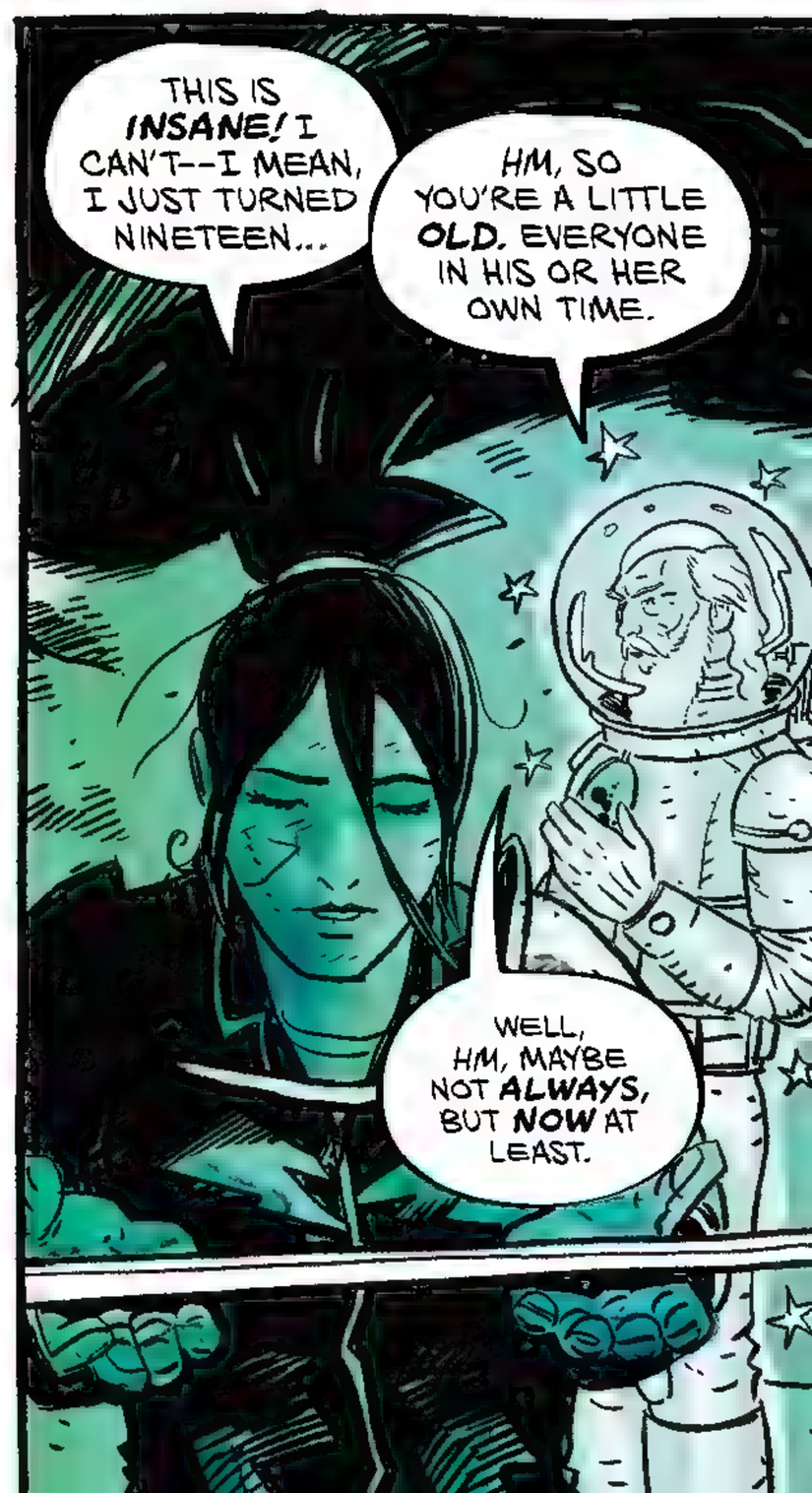

IT'S ABOUT TIME.
HEH, EVERYTHING'S ALL ABOUT TIME, THOUGH.
NO, OTHER, HM...OTHER MEANING. WAIT...
NOPE. MAYBE. NOPE! GOTTA GET MY PRESCRIPTION ADJUSTED, OR... NO, I FEEL FINE, BUT THAT...
...WHAT THE BLOODY HELL WAS THAT?

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT ALL ABOUT? AND WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
THE HELL I AM MERLIN.
LIKE THE WIZARD?
NOT "LIKE." THE WIZARD MERLIN. AND AS FOR WHAT THAT WAS ABOUT, YOU DID WHAT YOU NEEDED TO DO.

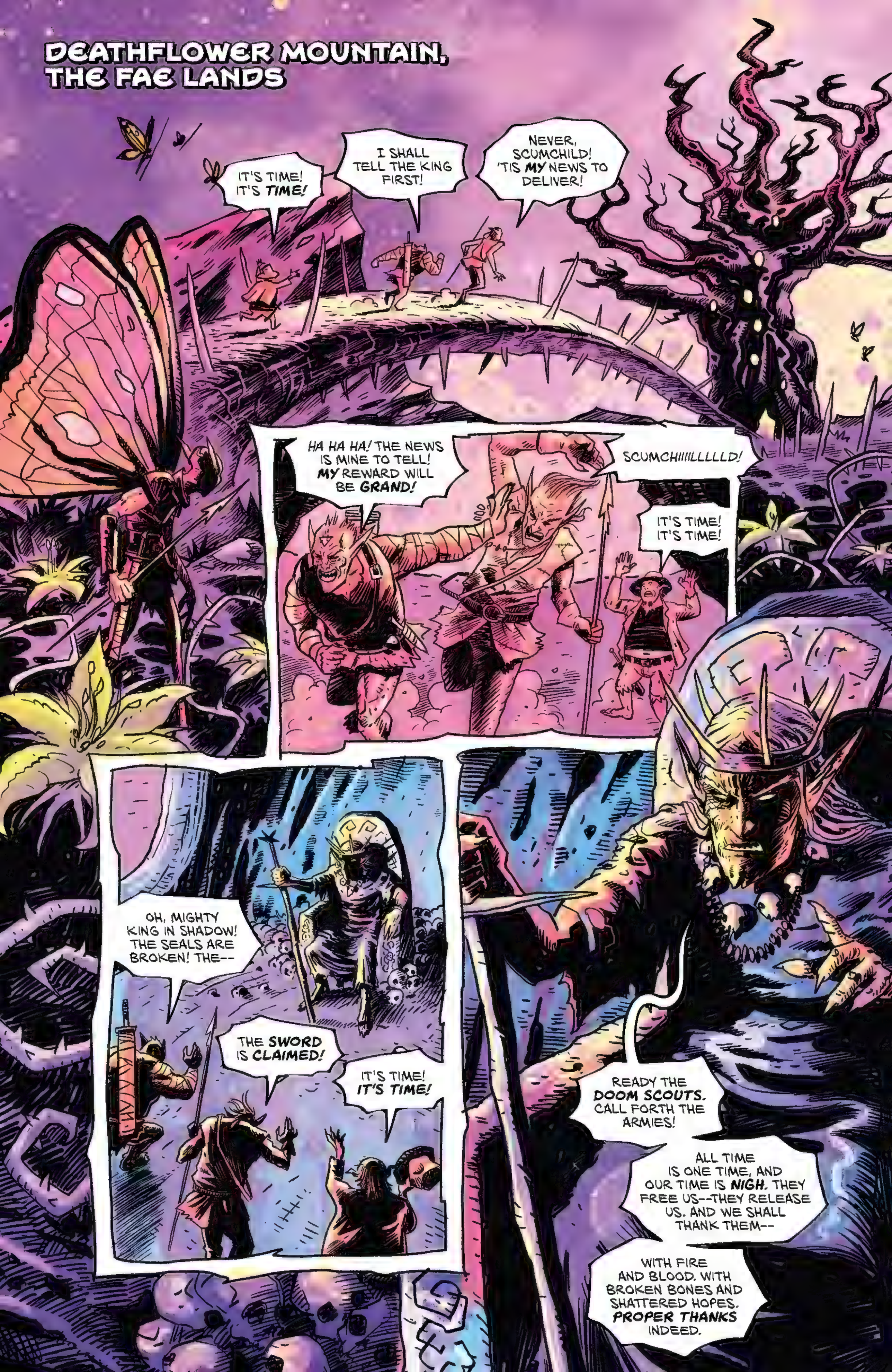

WAIT, UGH... WHY ARE YOU DRESSED LIKE A SPACEMAN?
AM I? AH, YES, YOU'D EXPECT THE ROBES AND THE, AH, POINTY HAT.
I'M WORKING MY WAY BACK THROUGH TIME, YOU SEE, AND TIME, WELL, IT'S LIKE AN ONION.

IT STINKS AND MAKES YOU CRY?
HEH, SOMETIMES. WHEN IT DRAGS OR YOU RUN OUT OF IT, BUT--NO, HM, WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT TIME IS LAYERED. NOT LINEAR, SO YOU SEE, UH, SPACE--SPACEMAN.
WHAT HAPPENED THEN HAPPENS NOW, AND THE FUTURE HAS ALREADY HAPPENED. IT'S ALL, WELL, LAYERED.


THIS...
IS A LOT TO ACCEPT, BUT YOU ARE THE ARTHUR FORETOLD, THE ONCE AND FUTURE...QUEEN, YES? YOU WILL UNITE THE WORLD.


THIS IS INSANE! I CAN'T--I MEAN, I JUST TURNED NINETEEN...
HM, SO YOU'RE A LITTLE OLD. EVERYONE IN HIS OR HER OWN TIME.
WELL, HM, MAYBE NOT ALWAYS, BUT NOW AT LEAST.

DEATHFLOWER MOUNTAIN, THE FAE LANDS



CORNWALL, ENGLAND

NOW *THAT'S* KING ARTHUR. ALL REGAL. ALSO, A MAN.

TRUE, BUT RANI ARTURUS--A PORTENTOUS NAME INDEED--*THIS* KING ARTHUR WAS A FRAUD TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF A FRACTURED COUNTRY.

GOOD FELLOW, DECENT HANDSHAKE--BUT, WELL, A *FAKE.*

EVEN IF I BELIEVE YOU ABOUT KING ARTHUR, I'M STILL NO *QUEEN*--AND I CAN'T CARRY THIS BIG-ASS SWORD AROUND ALL DAY!

THERE CAN BE *WISDOM* IN A LEAP OF *FAITH.* ARTHUR DID WHAT HE NEEDED TO, BUT HE NEVER WIELDED EXCALIBUR. YOU DO. AND IT ISN'T A SWORD.

NO, IT IS. SEE, IN MY HAND. A SWORD.

ONE CLEARLY TOO BIG FOR YOU TO LIFT, YET YOU *DO.* EXCALIBUR IS AN IDEA. A *SYMBOL.*

YOU LOT JUST RESPOND TO THE PHALLIC NATURE OF, WELL, *HM*...SWORDS.

CONSIDER IT IN A DIFFERENT FORM.

WHAT, YOU MEAN LIKE IF IT WAS A WATER BUFFALO, OR--

THINK MORE INCONSPICUOUS AND LESS *ALIVE,* PERHAPS?

LIKE A PICTURE OR--A TATTOO...?

TATTOO! YES, *HM.* THAT WORKS.

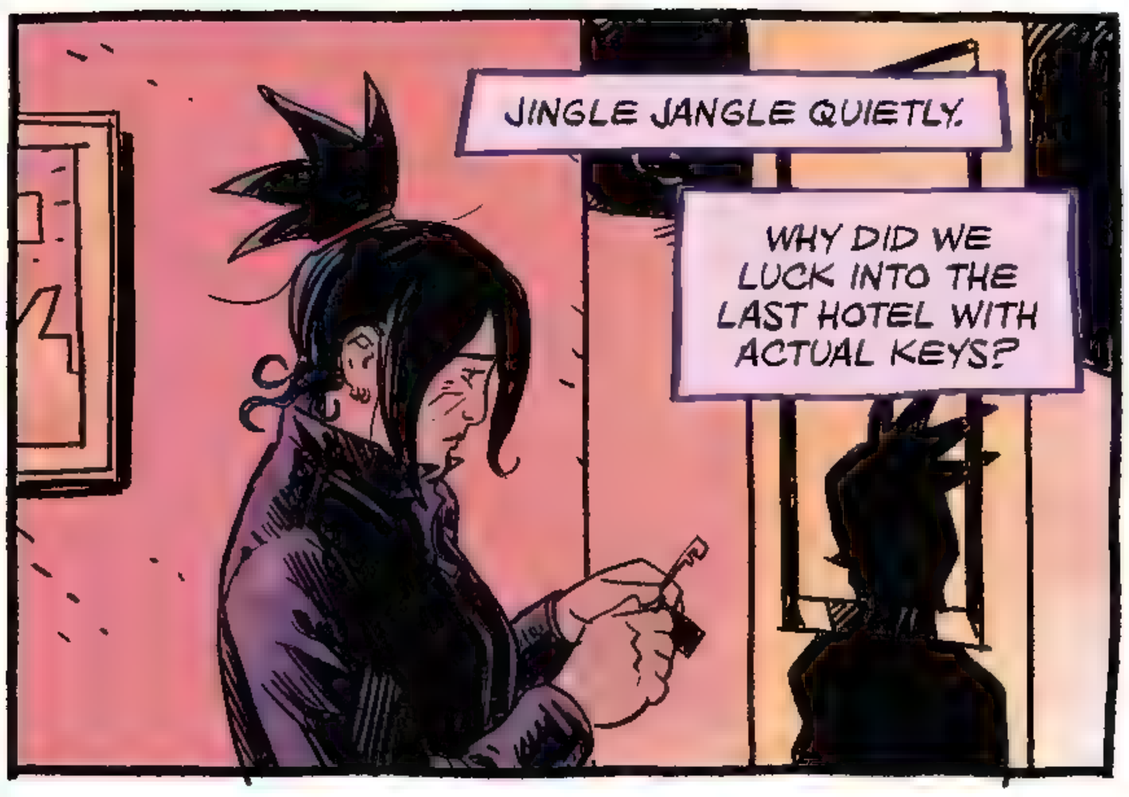
MY ARM ITCHES...

NOW YOU UNDERSTAND, YES? THIS IS *REAL,* MY QUEEN.

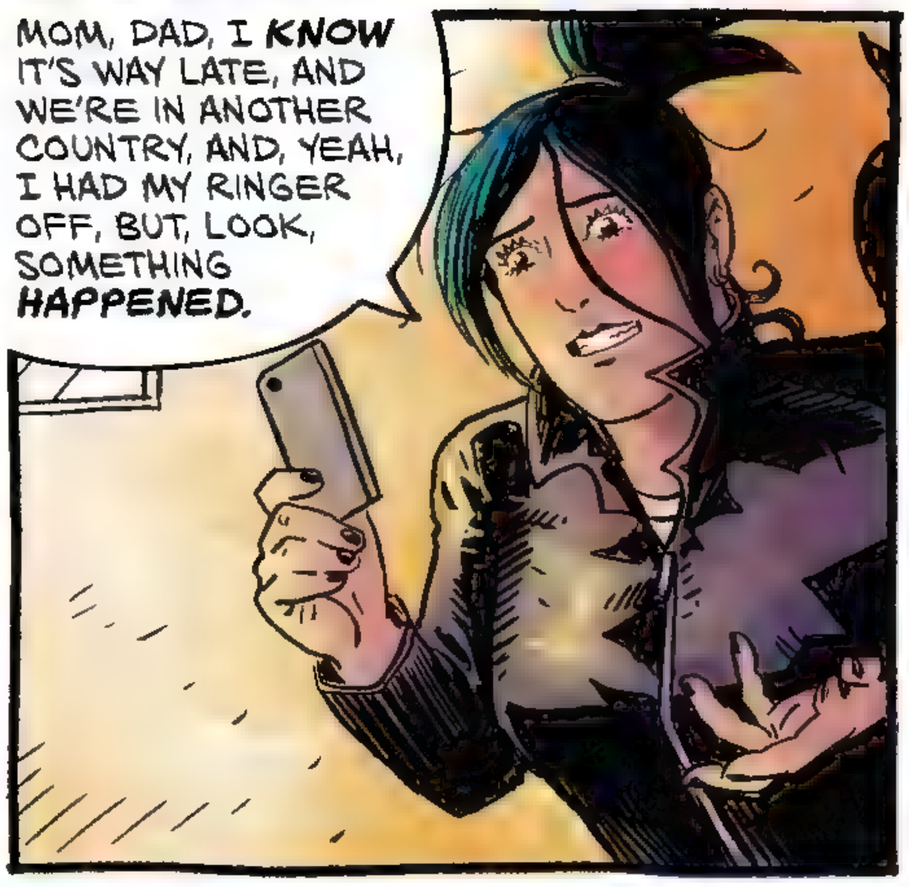
NOOOO WAY. THIS IS TOO...RIGHT, THAT'S IT. I'M OUTTA HERE. THIS'LL WASH OFF OR I HAVE A CONCUSSION OR BOTH.

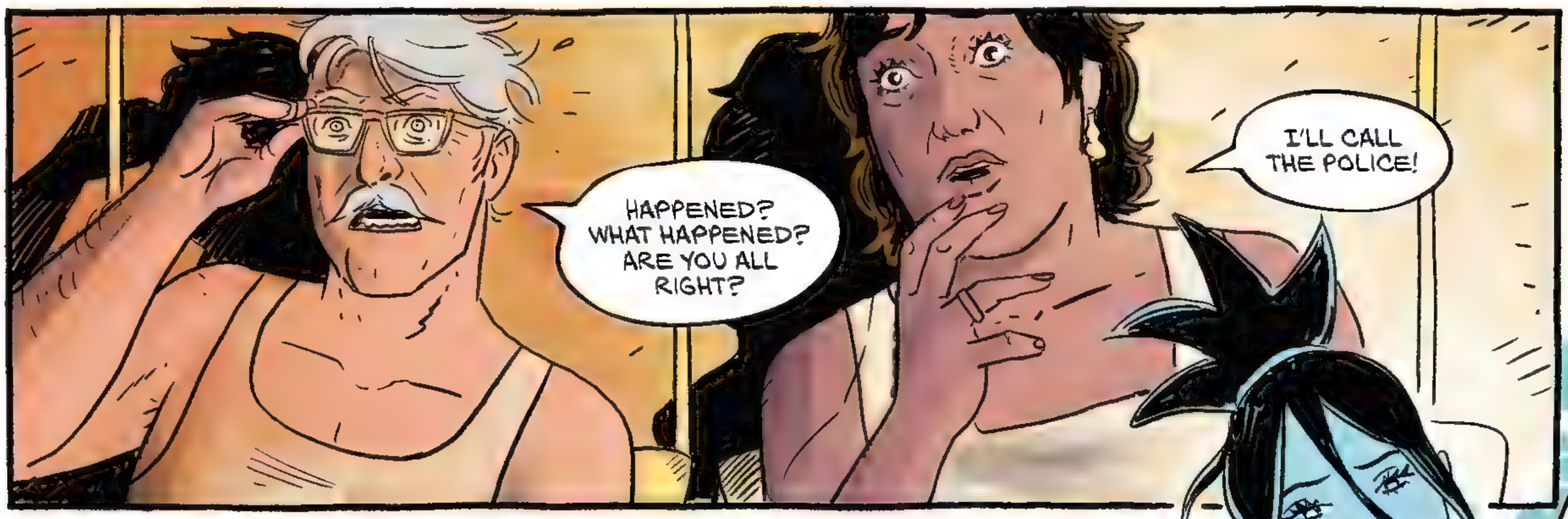
RETURN TO YOUR PARENTS, BUT CONSIDER WHAT I'VE SAID, *HM?* *FEEL* IT. SOON YOU WILL NEED TO *ACCEPT* IT.

THING IS, I DO ACCEPT IT ALREADY. DOUBT'S FADING. BUT ***WHY?***

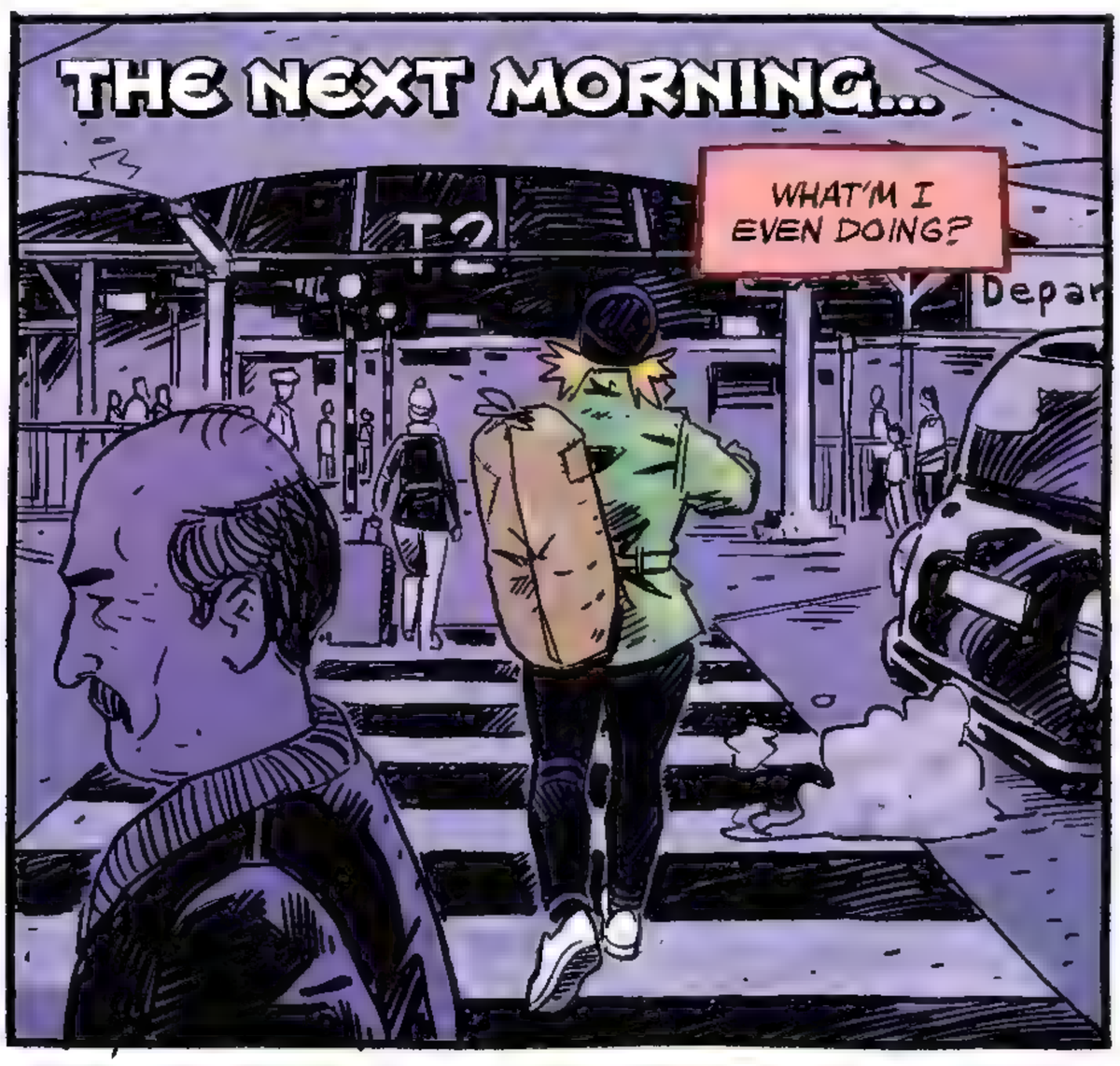

JINGLE JANGLE QUIETLY.
WHY DID WE LUCK INTO THE LAST HOTEL WITH ACTUAL KEYS?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS, YOUNG LADY? WE TRIED CALLING YOUR CELL!
WHA--? I'M UP. I'M UP!
CLICK


MOM, DAD, I **KNOW** IT'S WAY LATE, AND WE'RE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY, AND, YEAH, I HAD MY RINGER OFF, BUT, LOOK, SOMETHING **HAPPENED.**


HAPPENED? WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I'LL CALL THE POLICE!

NO, NO, IT'S JUST, SEE...
APPARENTLY I'M THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND OR SOMETHING?


THE NEXT MORNING...
WHAT'M I EVEN DOING?

AS SOON AS I CLOSE MY EYES, "PORTLAND." CAN'T GET IT OUTTA MY MIND. WHAT'S IN PORTLAND? NO, IT'S **WHO.**
OR IS IT "WHOM"?
BLIMEY.

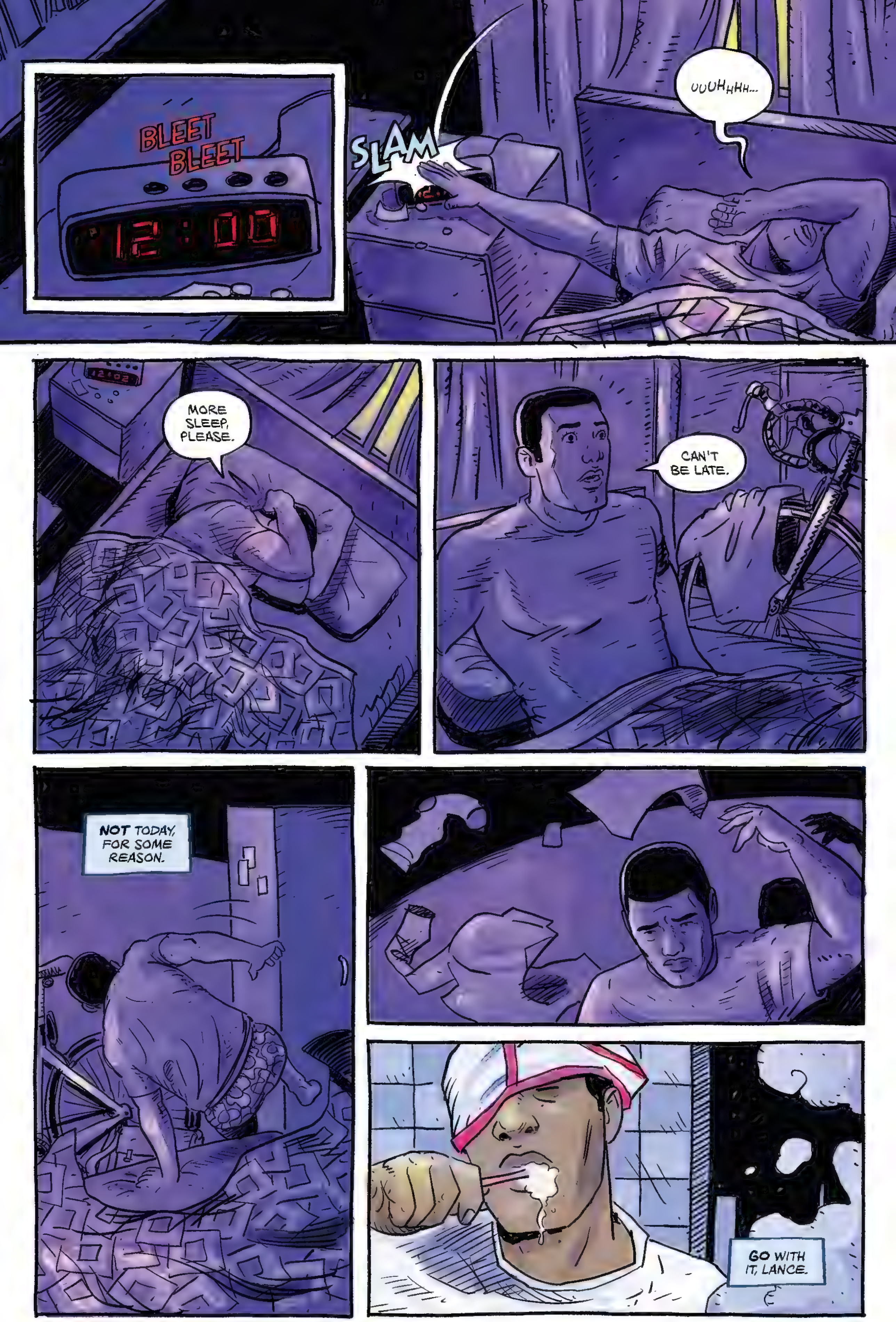
WHY DO WE HAVE TO CUT THE TRIP SHORT? MAYBE WE SHOULD GO TALK TO MERLIN--
IT'S THE **PRESSURE.** SCHOOL, CHESS--WE JUST WANTED TO HELP YOU SUCCEED--
PRESSURE DIDN'T MAKE THAT SWORD MAGICALLY APPEAR!
MY SKIN CRAWLS JUST THINKING ABOUT--

SHH! DON'T MENTION THE "ORD-SWAY."

YES, IT'S A WEE BIT EARLY IN THE MORNING FOR A PINT.
BUT I'M ALSO FLYING TO PORTLAND ON A HUNCH, SO...

WHAT'RE YOU DOIN'?
EVEN FOR WEE LOST GWEN, **THIS**--THIS IS ABOVE AND BEYOND.

PORTLAND, OREGON, USA
...BUT IT'S ALL JUST LEGEND, YEAH? WE'RE TOO CALM. IF THIS WERE REAL WE'D BE PANICKED.
WE BOTH SAW THE MAGIC SWORD! AND WE...WE ARE. PANICKED, I MEAN. I CAN FEEL THAT. SORT OF.
ARE THEY CALMLY FREAKING OUT? MAYBE TOTALLY LOSING IT. WHY'D I SHOW THEM?
SOON...
NICE CHESSBOARD. WHATEVER. LETS ME THINK. AND HEY, THEY DID ASK ME TO NOT FIND ANY OTHER MYSTICAL OBJECTS.
MY PARENTS ARE TAKING THIS TOO WELL. WE ALL ARE. WHY'D I LEAVE MERLIN? DID HE DO THIS?
GOOD QUESTION. DID THE FAKE SPACEMAN HALLUCINATION DO--
RIGHT. HELLO, THEN.
YOU! WHAT'RE YOU--
I DECIDED TO TAKE HOLIDAY IN PORTLAND.
NO? OKAY, LOOK, I HAD TO--I WAS COMPELLED TO SEE YOU. I'M TERRIFIED BUT ALSO...FINE WITH IT?
AFTER... YOU, THE CAVE... LIGHTS AND, WHO EVEN KNOWS!
YOU SAW ALL THAT?
YEAH, AND IT--WHAT TIME IS IT? IS IT THE MIDDLE OF MY NIGHT? CAN WE GET FOOD WHILE WE TALK?


BLEET
BLEET
12:00
SLAM
UUUHHHH...
MORE SLEEP, PLEASE.
CAN'T BE LATE.
NOT TODAY, FOR SOME REASON.
GO WITH IT, LANCE.

YOU JUST GOT A TICKET AS SOON AS YOU WERE HOME?

I TOLD YOU-- **COMPELLED.**

DON'T YOU, I DUNNO, **FEEL** SOMETHING?

HELLO, LADIES. I SEE...***YOU?***

I, YEAH, ME, WHY, OH--LANCE? RIGHT?

OOOH, YOU TWO KNOW EACH OTHER?

YEAH! RAN!, HIGH SCHOOL--AND YOUR MOM ALMOST RAN ME OVER A FEW DAYS AGO.

THAT WAS YOU? YIKES. OH, SORRY, THIS IS GWEN.

HI THERE.

SO, HOW DO YOU TWO--

HOLY SHIT, IS THAT MORGAN PARI IN THAT CORNER BOOTH?

WHO WHERE?

ONLY THE MOST FAMOUS CHILDREN'S AUTHOR THERE IS, RIGHT, RAN!?

WELL, **Y.A.**, WHICH IS ***DIFFERENT.*** I MEAN, I STARTED READING HER IN JUNIOR HIGH.

YOU SHOULD INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

NO. SHOULD I? NO, I COULDN'T...

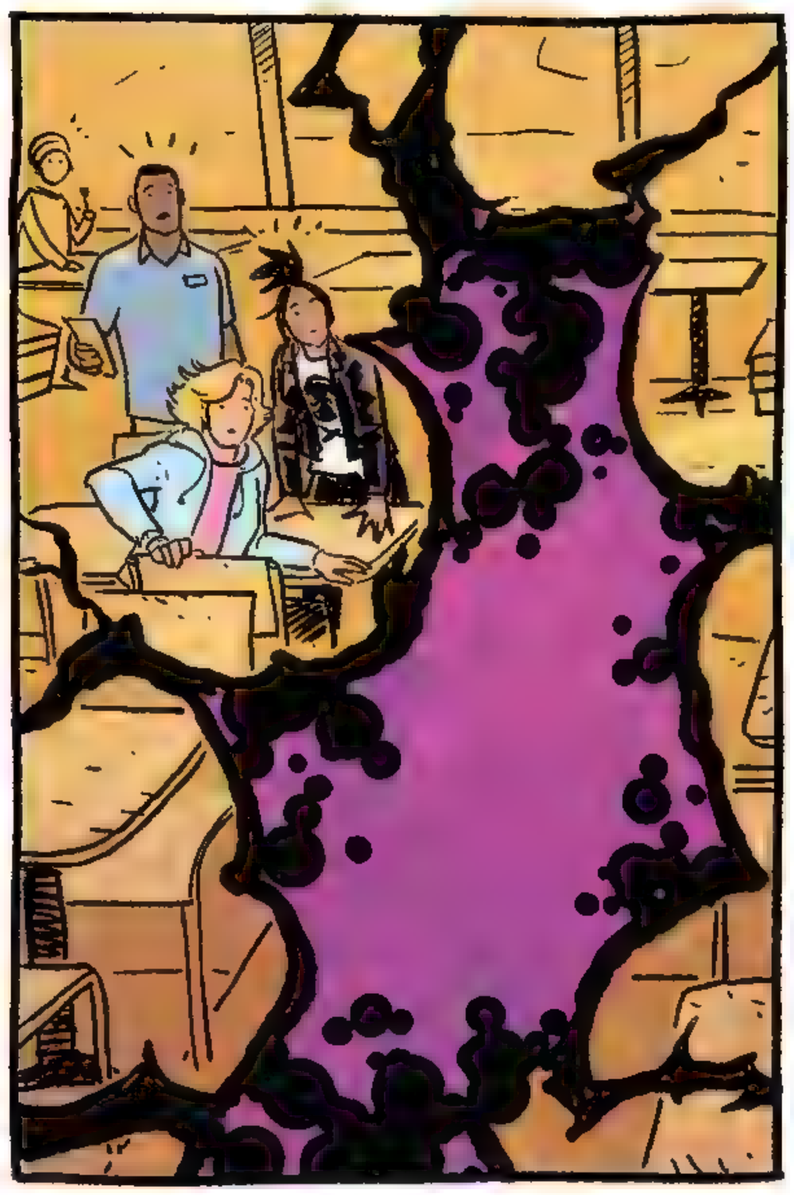
"...SHE LOOKS BUSY."

DAMN IT ALL.

HEY, MS. PARI, YOU FORGOT TO PAY!

DID YOUR FAVORITE WRITER JUST DINE AND DASH?
IS IT GETTING CHILLY IN HERE ALL THE SUDDEN?

PTZZ



UGH, THE STENCH OF HOOMAN!
SPREAD OUT! FIND THE FEMALE!
EVERYONE GET BACK!
WHAT THE--?
THERE IT IS!
THE SWORD!
THE FLESHLING, SHE HAS IT!
WHAT IS HAPPENING?!
COME AND GET IT, FREAKS.
GWEN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
STARTIN' A FIGHT!

GRRRR!
UT!
KLANG
OOPH!
GRRAAH!
WHOA. IS IT ME OR THE SWORD FIGHTING?
TAKE THAT, UGLY!
OOPH!
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?!
GET TO COVER!
URK!
NUH-UH!
LOOK AT YOU GO, RAN!
I'M NOT HIDING WHILE YOU TWO SAVE ME!
THAT'S THE SPIRIT!
THIS ISN'T A GAME!

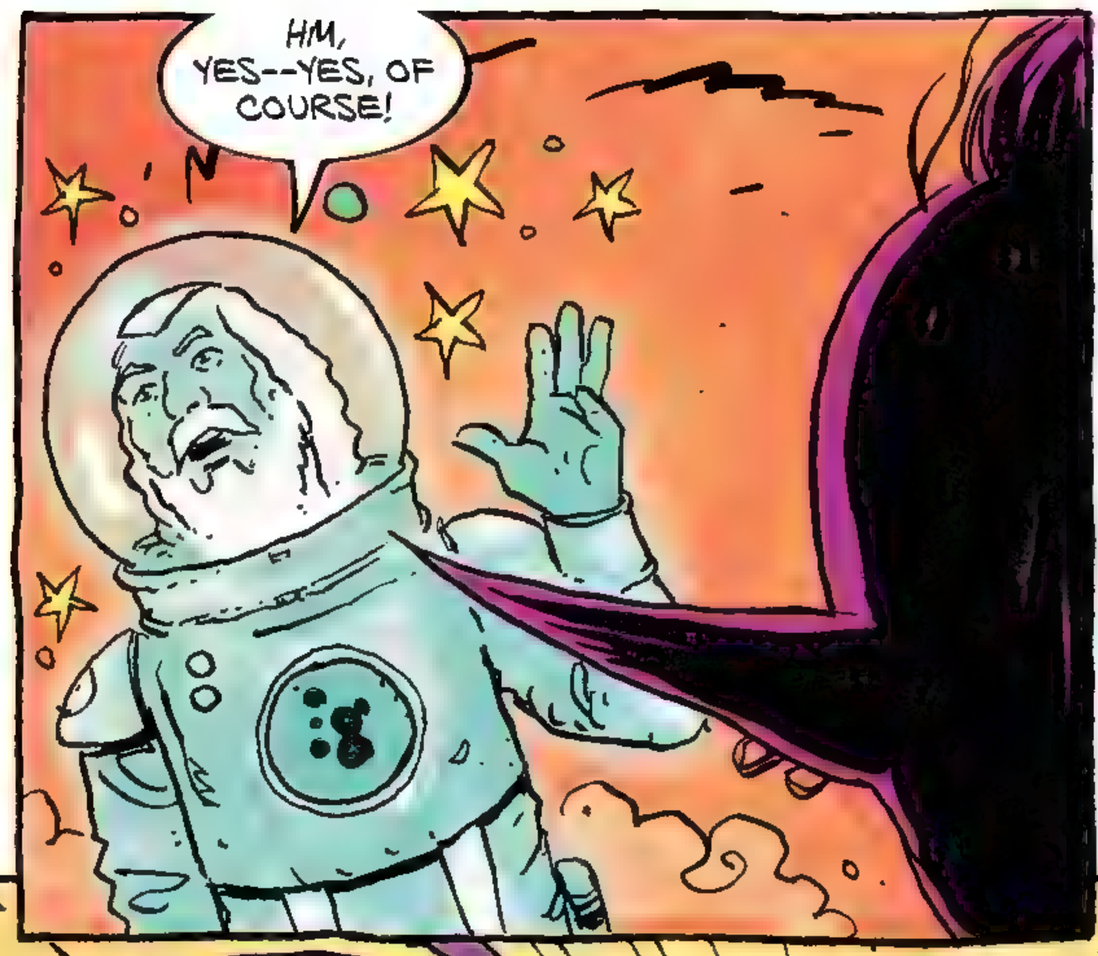
STAY DOWN!
HOOF!
SMASH
EEYAAAAH!
HOOMAN MEATSACKS! WE'LL CRUNCH YOUR BONES AND DRINK YOUR BLOOD!
EAT YOUR LIVERS AND DANCE ON YOUR GRAVES!
WHY...WHO ARE YOU, EVEN?
YOU'LL WHAT TO OUR WHAT?
TROLLS.
TROLLS?! HOW DARE YOU! WE'RE FAE!
UMPH!
TOUGH TALK!
POW

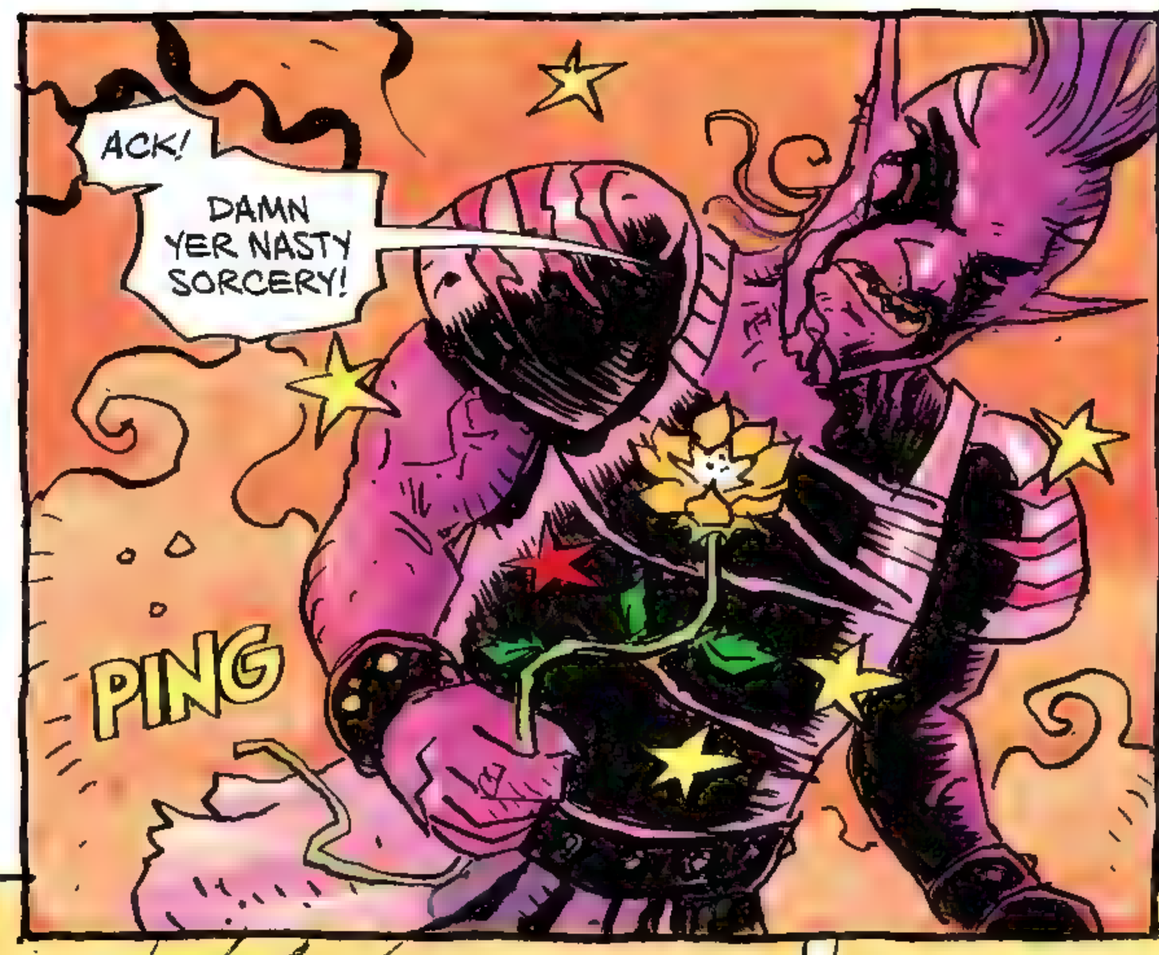
DAMN IT, GWEN, THEY'RE AFTER ME--AND I HAVE A SWORD.
THEN USE IT, OR GIVE IT OVER. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY I'M HERE! OR THEM! OR--
OR ANYTHING! WHAT'S GOING ON?!?
THE DAY SHALL BE OURS!
WE'LL SPILL YER GUTS!
THEN WE'LL FEAST UPON THE REST OF THE HOOMAN INFESTATION!
OVER MY DEAD BODY!
THIS IS HOW IT BEGINS. PROPHECY AND THE PAST AND FUTURE ALL TANGLED AS HISTORY BEGINS IN BLOOD AND, HM, YES, ANGER.
BUT CAN WE UNWEAVE THE STRANDS, AND PREVENT IT?
CAN THEY?

CHAPTER TWO

THESE FAE ARE...LIKE EXTRA-NASTY VERSIONS OF THE "DARK FAERIES" IN MORGAN PARI'S BOOKS.

WHERE'S YOUR HEAD AT, RANI?

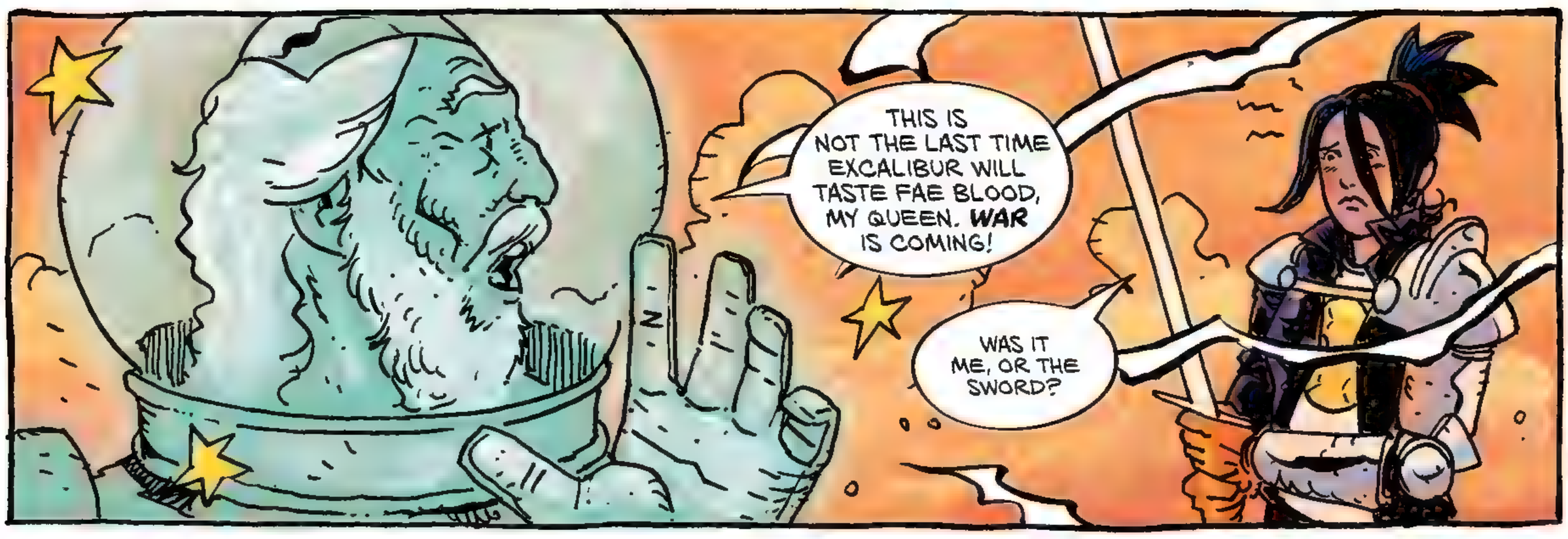

HM, YES--YES, OF COURSE!


ACK!
DAMN YER NASTY SORCERY!
PING

HEEYA-- OHMIGOD!
AARGH!
HACK

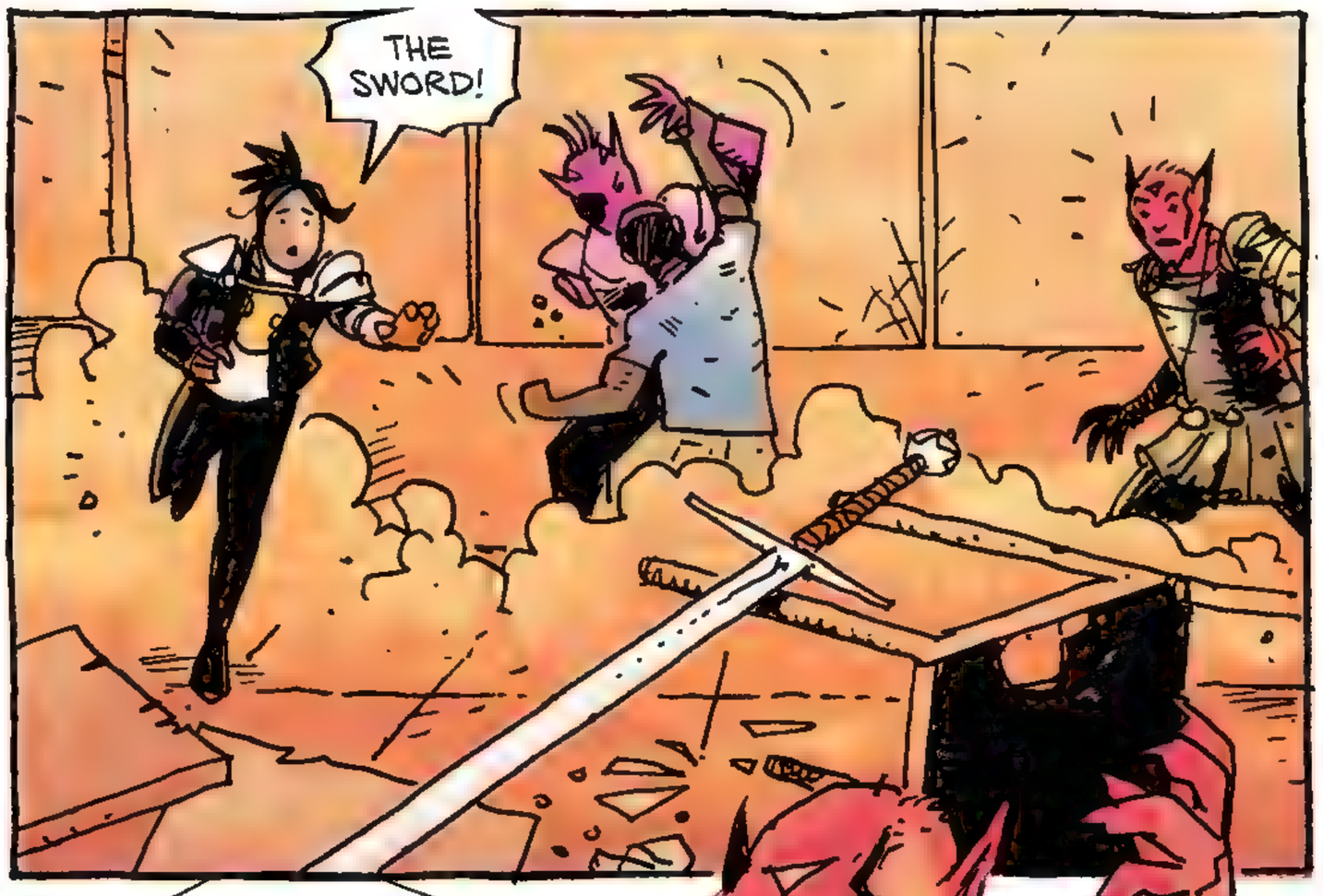
THAT'S NASTY FIGHTIN', RANI!

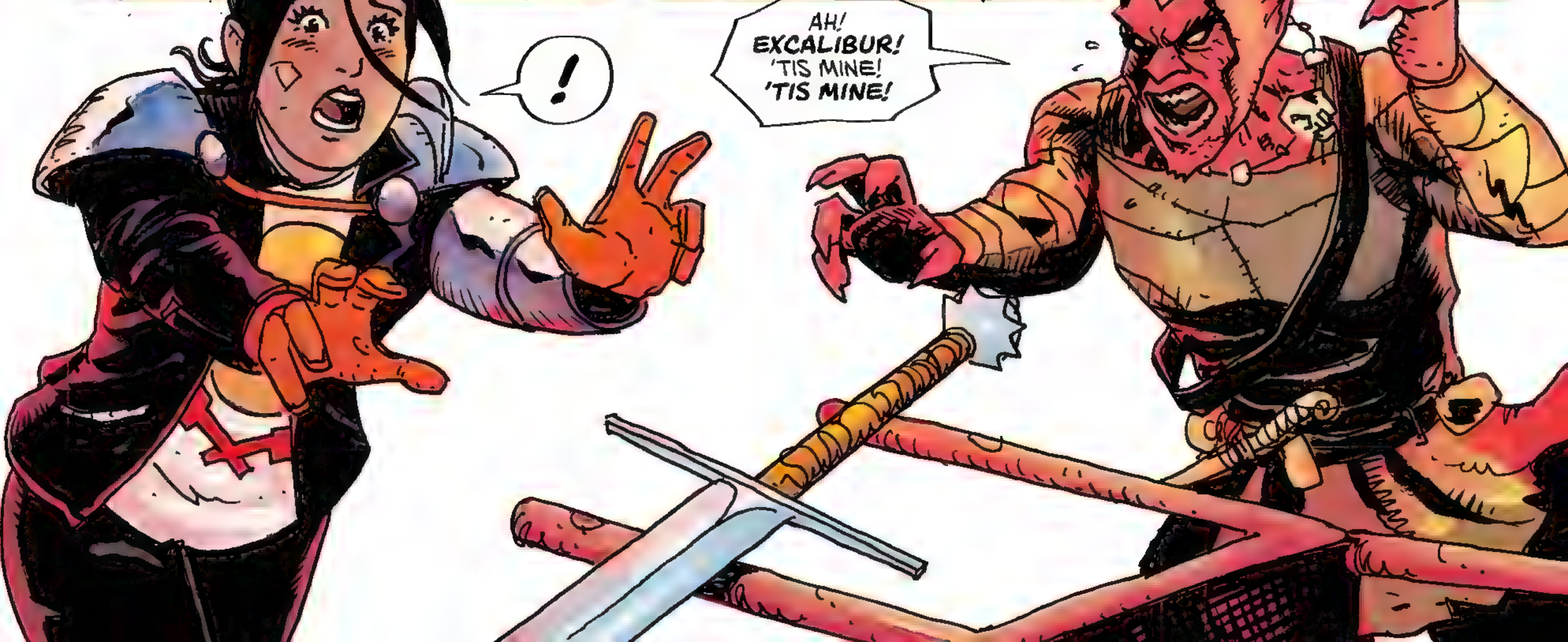
I DIDN'T-- I DIDN'T MEAN...!
HOO-CHA!


THIS IS NOT THE LAST TIME EXCALIBUR WILL TASTE FAE BLOOD, MY QUEEN. WAR IS COMING!
WAS IT ME, OR THE SWORD?

HOOMAN SLIME!
THUNK
UT!

HURGH!


THE SWORD!

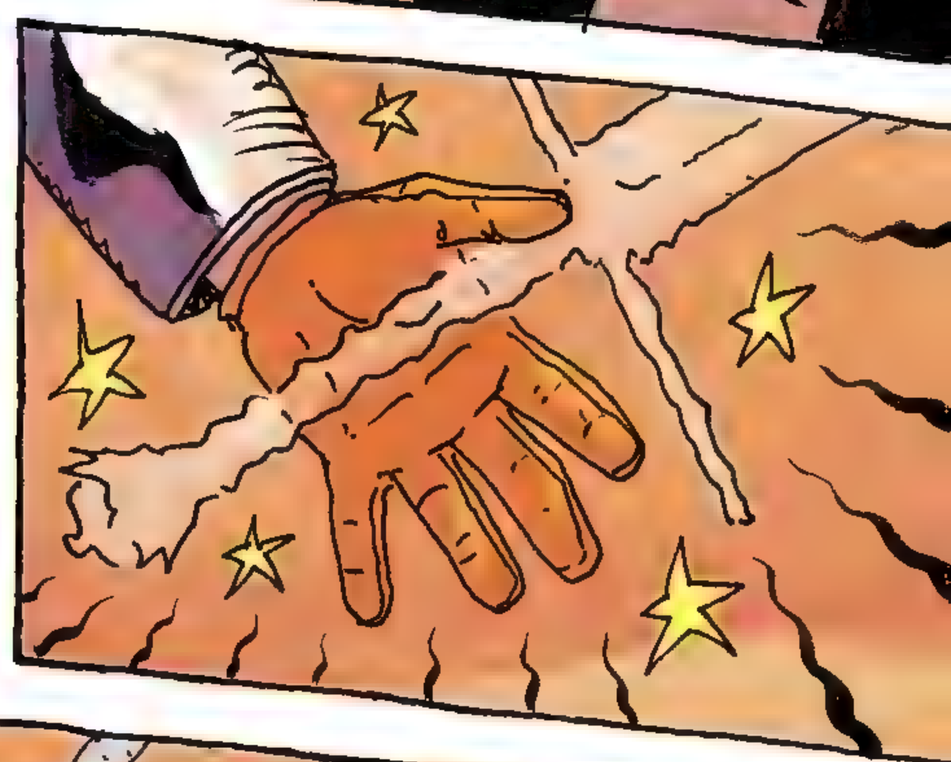

!
AH! EXCALIBUR! 'TIS MINE! 'TIS MINE!

HMM-UP!
RANI! NEVER LET THE FAE GET THEIR CLAWS ON EXCALIBUR!

I'M TRYING TO-- URK!
NOT SO MIGHTY WITHOUT YOUR BLADE, ARE YE, FLESHLING?

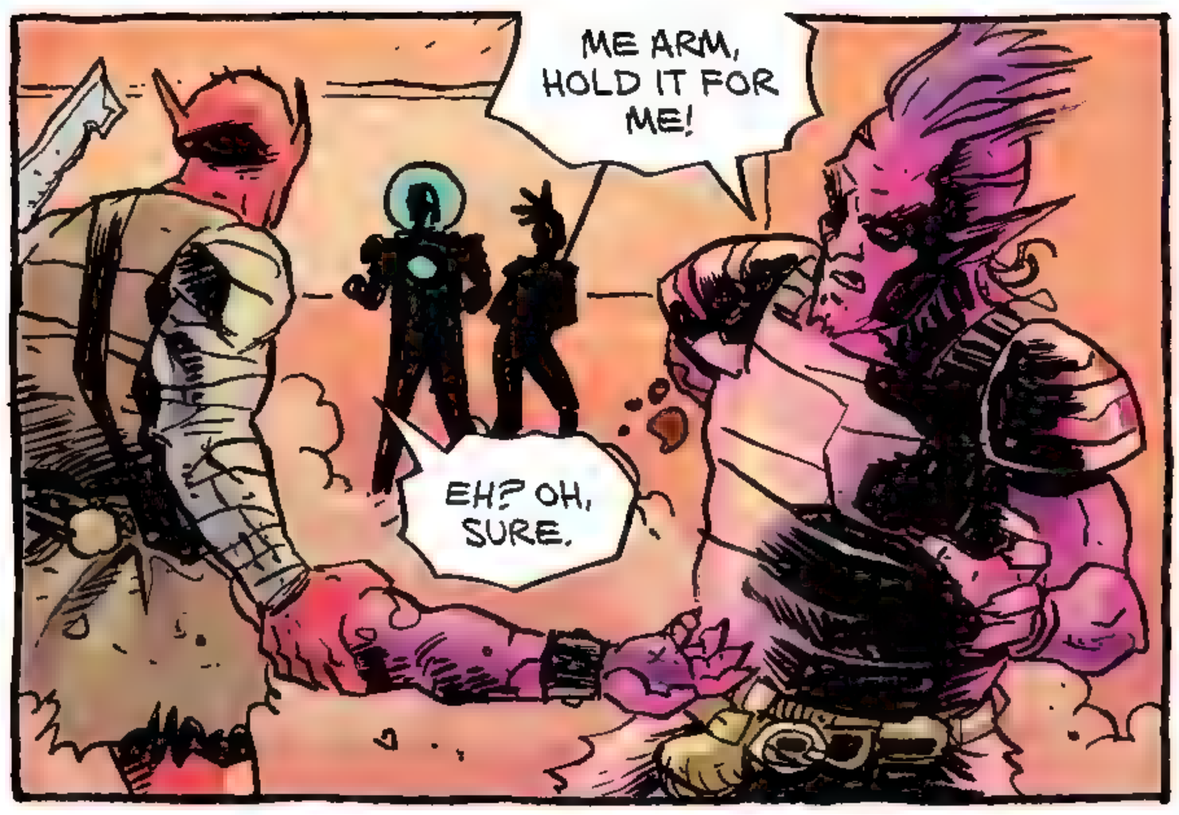
LET HER GO, YE BASTARD!

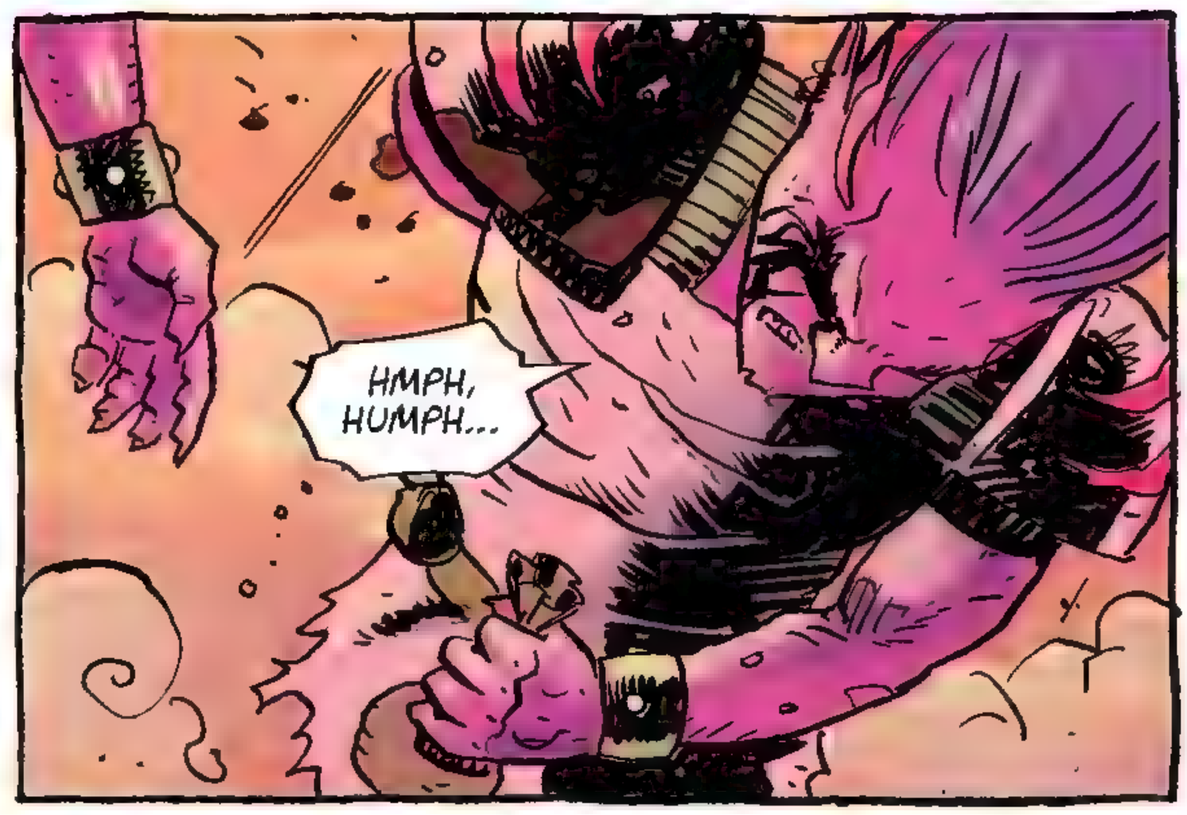
RANI! THE SWORD!
CALL TO IT!



CLANG
NO!

GWEN! LANCE! FLANK THEM ON EITHER SIDE!
BOX 'EM IN!
TOO SOON SHE LEARNS!
HM, YES! THAT'LL DO NICELY!
WHAT WAS THAT USELESS FLASH?
DAMN IT. SURROUNDED.
WE NEED TO END THIS NOW!


ME ARM, HOLD IT FOR ME!
EH? OH, SURE.


HMPH, HUMPH...

RETREAT!
NAY! I'M NO COWARD!

DEVIL, WHAT, UH, HOW--WHAT ARE YOU...?

BACK NOW, LUMIT! WE MUST REPORT TO THE KING!
THE KING LIVES?
AYE, AND HE'LL BE VERY INTERESTED IN YOUR NEW CHAMPION!
GRRR

STAY AND *FIGHT*, MONSTERS!

WHOA! EASY! WE *WANT* THEM TO LEAVE, DON'T WE?

HSSSsS!

FUMP

WHY'D YOU LET 'EM GET AWAY, MAGICIAN?

HM, WELL, BEST TO LET THEM ESCAPE RATHER THAN RISK THE FIGHT SPREADING OUTSIDE.

SO WE FOLLOW 'EM!

OH, MAN. COPS AND PEOPLE. UH...

WE FOUR ARE NOT READY FOR AN ASSAULT ON THE FAE KINGDOM, YOUNG LADY.

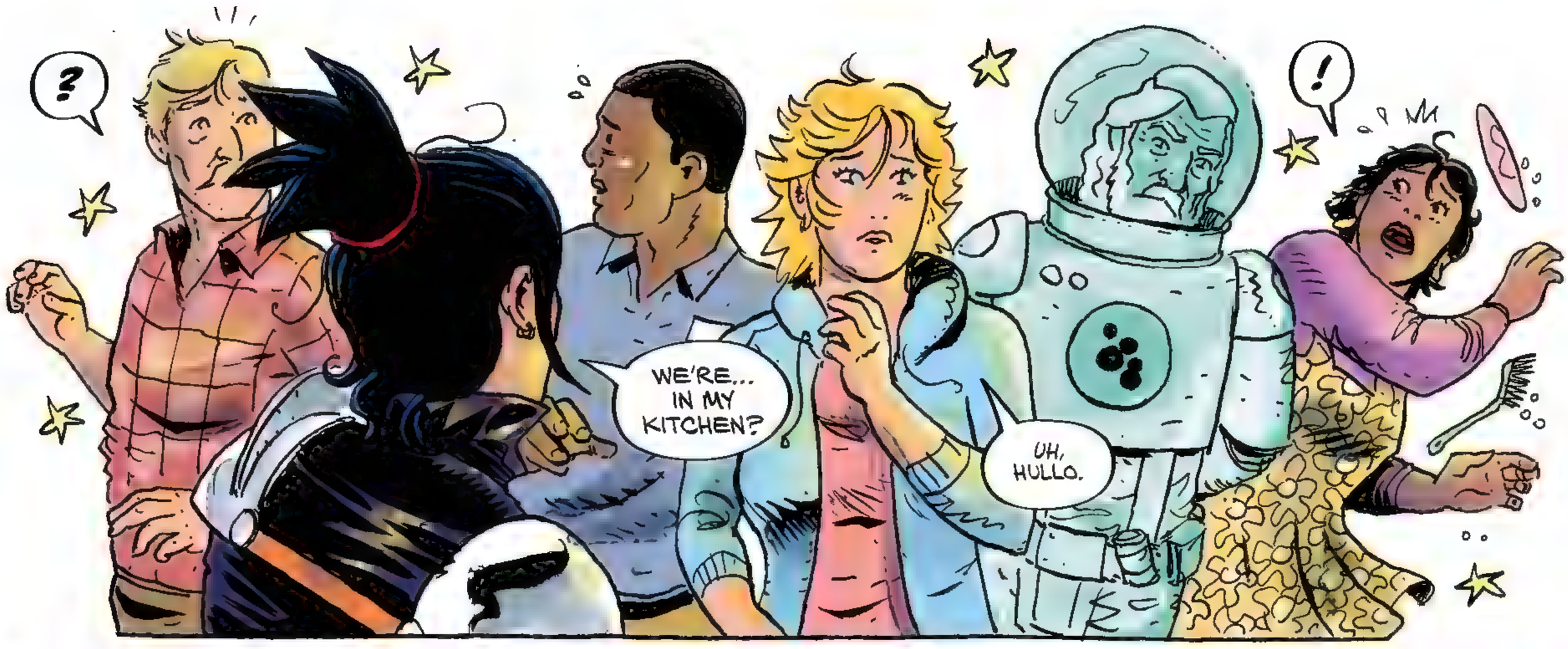
DON'T "YOUNG LADY" ME, SPACE MAN!

MERLIN, WE NEED TO SPLIT WHILE AVOIDING THAT CROWD, ESPECIALLY THE COPS.

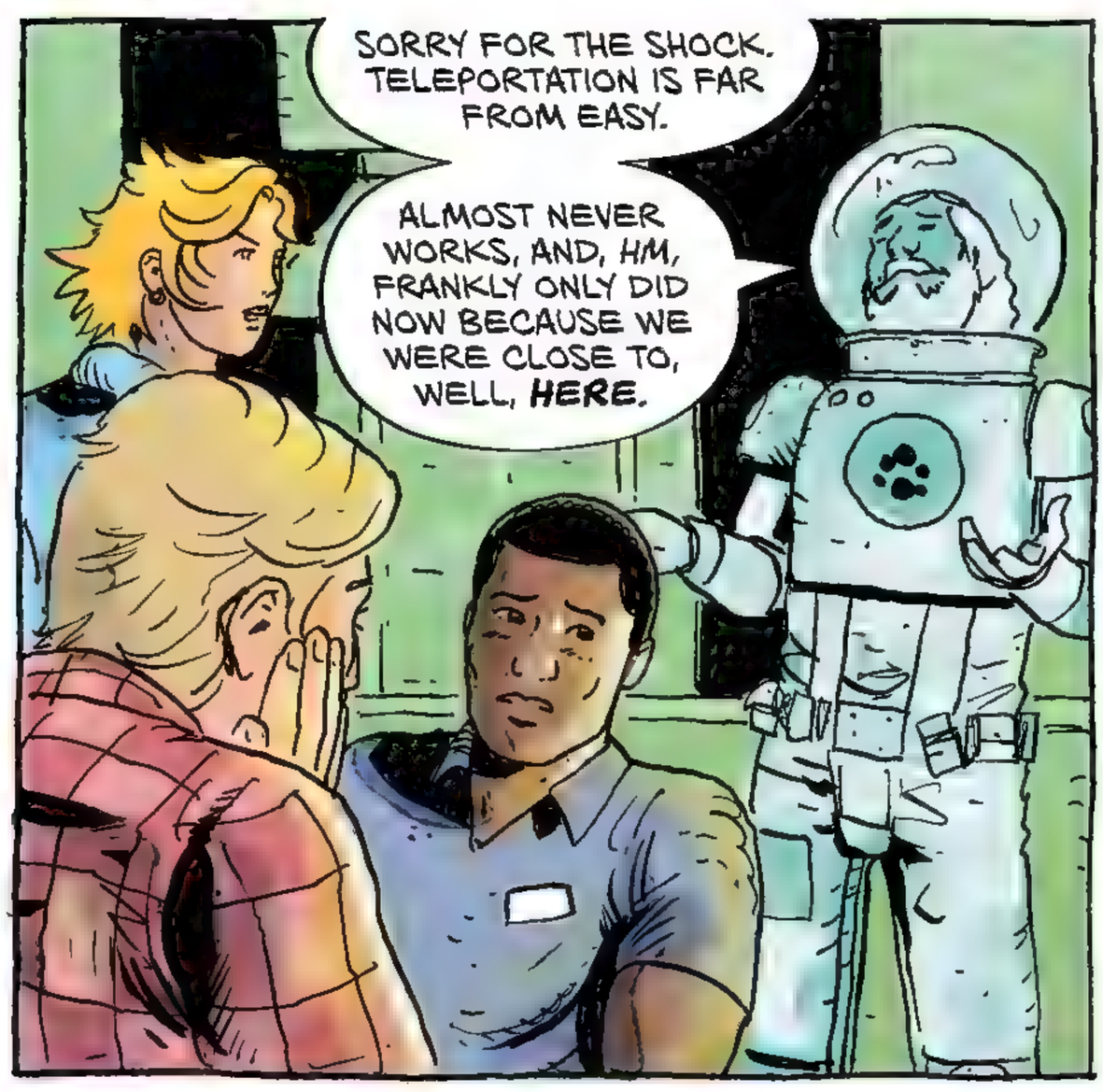
CAN YOU TRANSPORT US LIKE YOU DO YOURSELF?

DIFFICULT, BUT DOABLE.

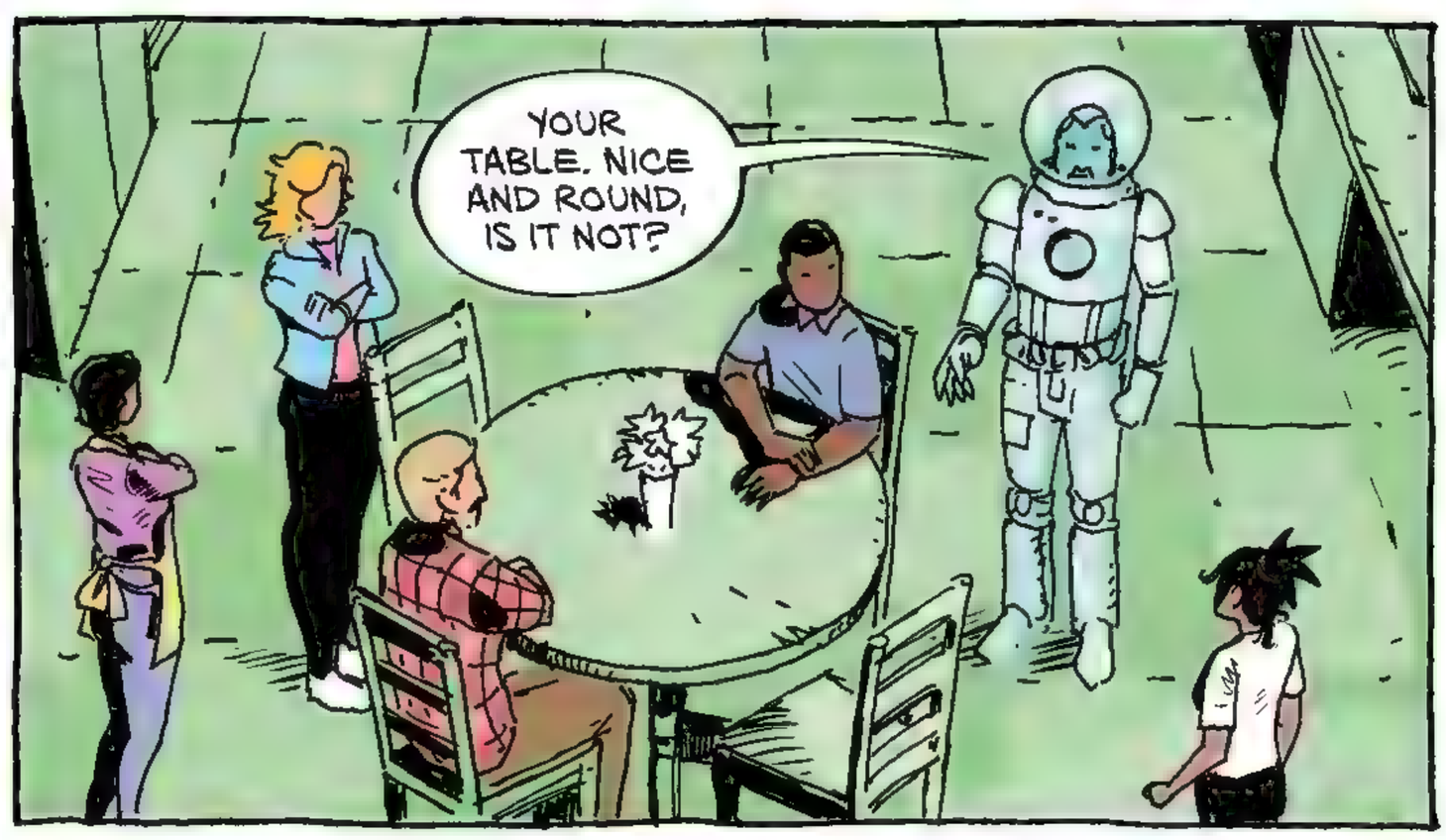
ON OCCASION.


?
WE'RE... IN MY KITCHEN?
UH, HULLO.
!

AND SOON...
YEAH, THAT MERLIN.
WHY'S HE LOOK LIKE A SPACE MAN?
DUNNO.


SORRY FOR THE SHOCK. TELEPORTATION IS FAR FROM EASY.
ALMOST NEVER WORKS, AND, HM, FRANKLY ONLY DID NOW BECAUSE WE WERE CLOSE TO, WELL, HERE.

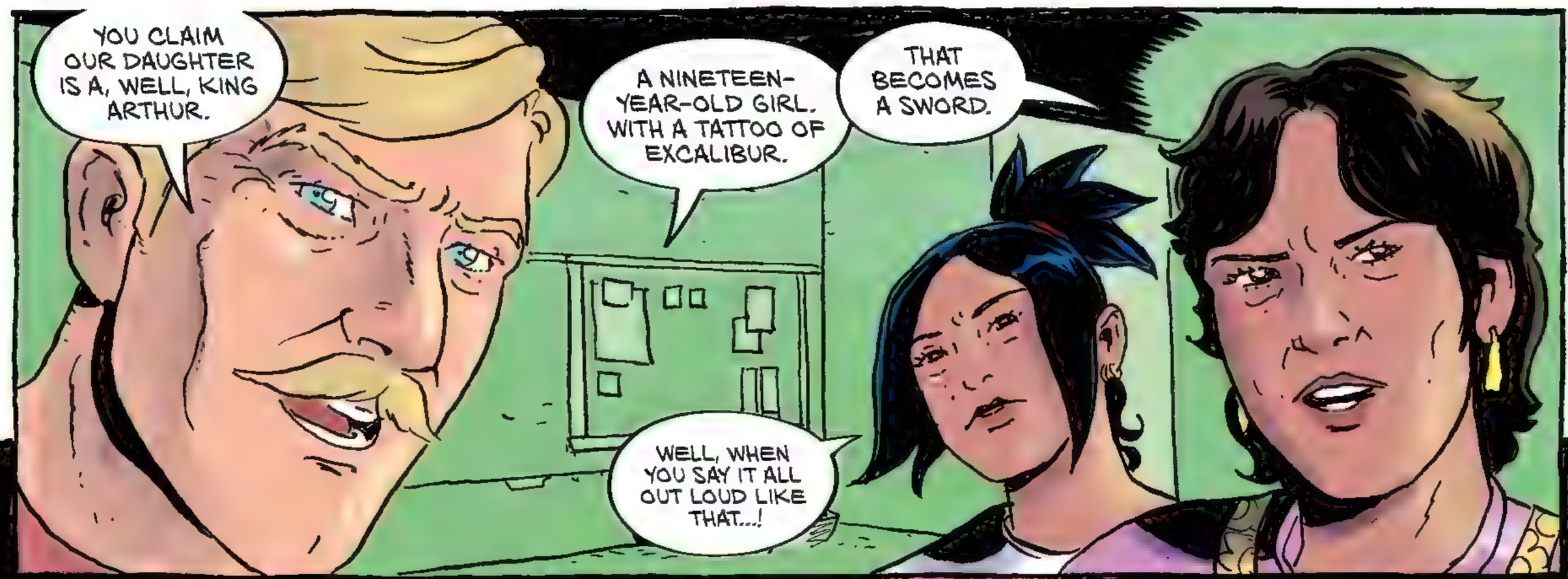
DID YOU GIVE THIS WEIRDO OUR ADDRESS?
WHY HERE, MERLIN?


YOUR TABLE. NICE AND ROUND, IS IT NOT?

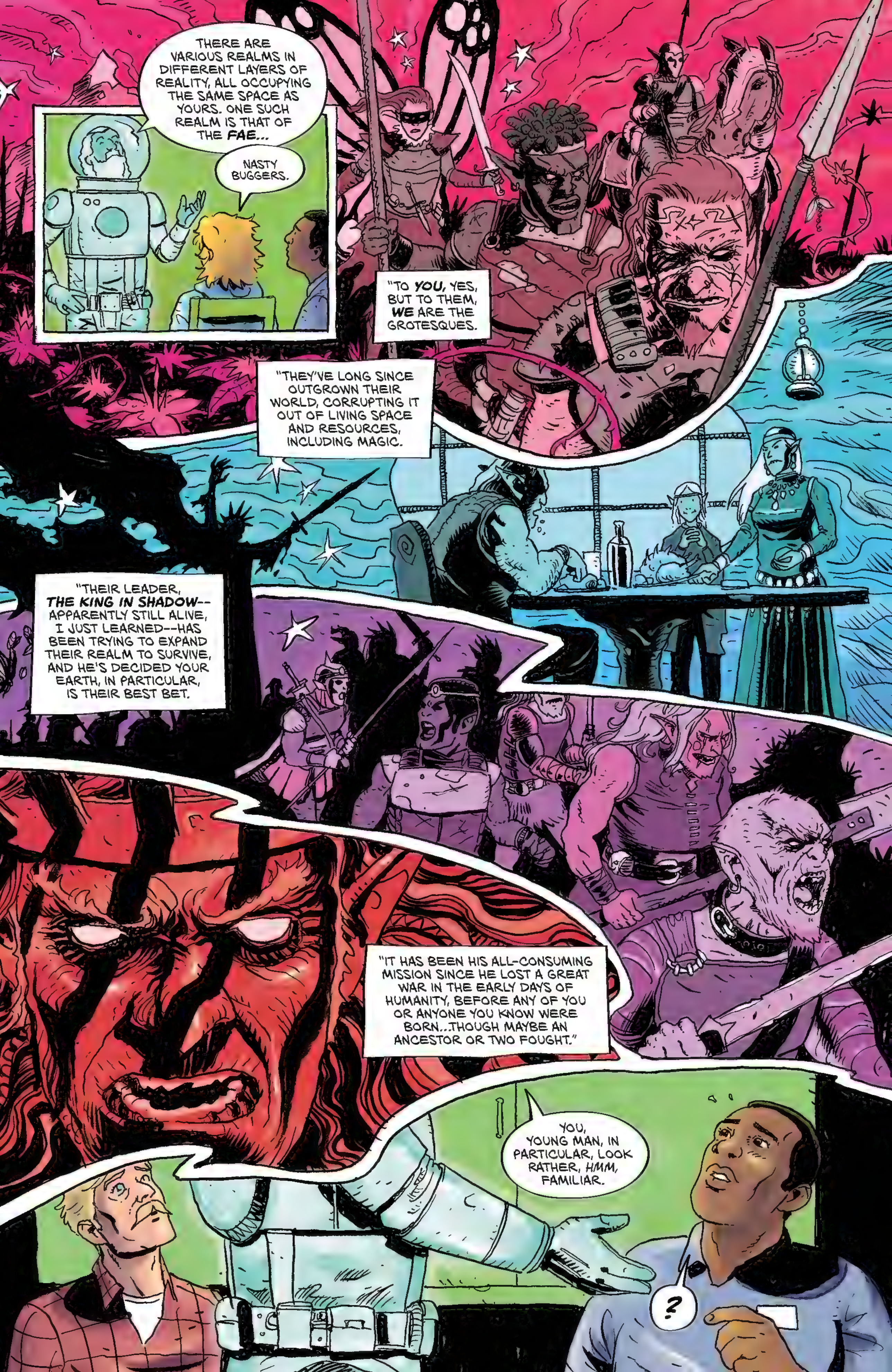
WHAT THE... HELL...IS GOING ONNNNN...?

ANSWERS, MERLIN.
NOW.

WHAT'S THE, AHH, WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

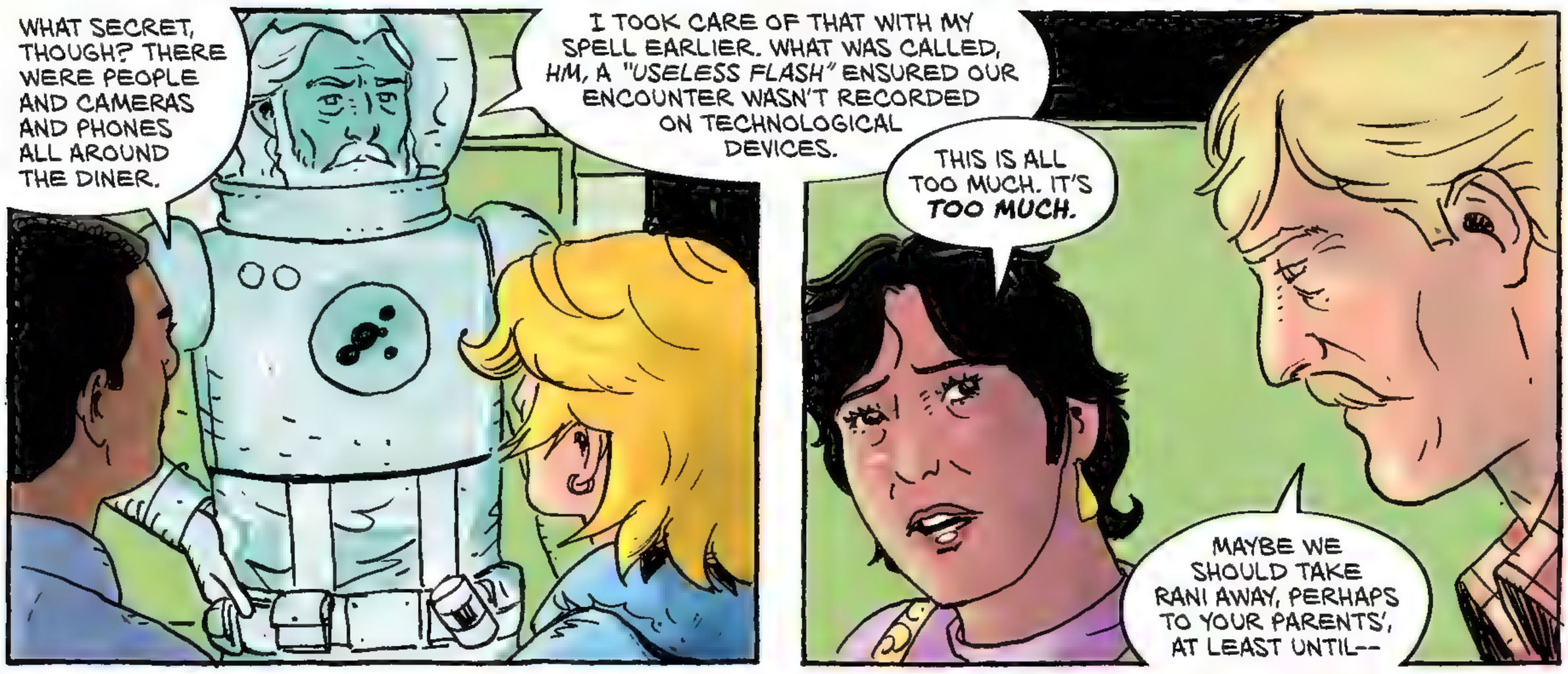

YOU CLAIM OUR DAUGHTER IS A, WELL, KING ARTHUR.
A NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL. WITH A TATTOO OF EXCALIBUR.
THAT BECOMES A SWORD.
WELL, WHEN YOU SAY IT ALL OUT LOUD LIKE THAT...!

OH! OF COURSE! THIS IS THE BEGINNING FOR YOU, AND BEGINNINGS ARE ALWAYS CONFUSING.
I REMEMBER, AS A BABY, OF COURSE, TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY OWLS COULD FLY, BUT I COULDN'T--AH, WELL, I'M GETTING OFF TRACK...
MY BEGINNING IS SOMETHING OF A PROLOGUE TO YOURS...
OH GOOD. I LOVE A STORY.

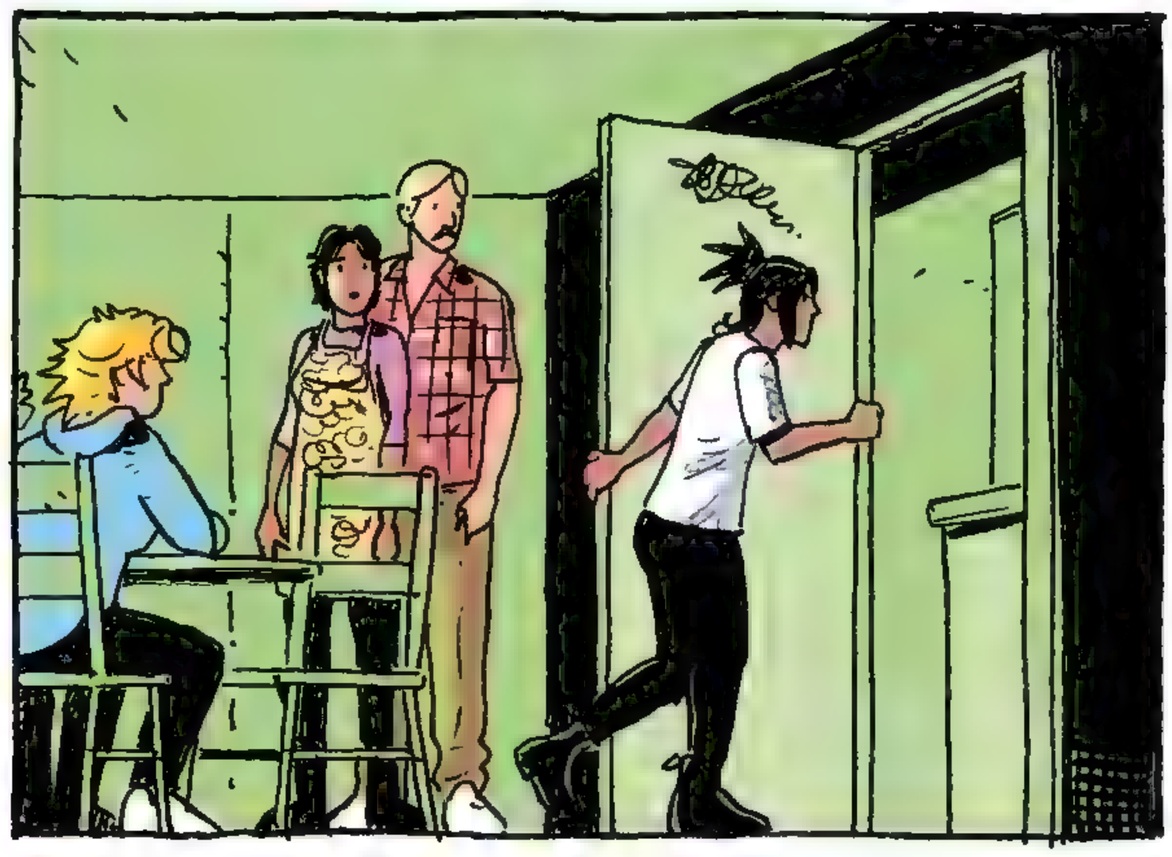

THERE ARE VARIOUS REALMS IN DIFFERENT LAYERS OF REALITY, ALL OCCUPYING THE SAME SPACE AS YOURS. ONE SUCH REALM IS THAT OF THE FAE...
NASTY BUGGERS.
"TO YOU, YES, BUT TO THEM, WE ARE THE GROTESQUES.
"THEY'VE LONG SINCE OUTGROWN THEIR WORLD, CORRUPTING IT OUT OF LIVING SPACE AND RESOURCES, INCLUDING MAGIC.
"THEIR LEADER, THE KING IN SHADOW-- APPARENTLY STILL ALIVE, I JUST LEARNED--HAS BEEN TRYING TO EXPAND THEIR REALM TO SURVIVE, AND HE'S DECIDED YOUR EARTH, IN PARTICULAR, IS THEIR BEST BET.
"IT HAS BEEN HIS ALL-CONSUMING MISSION SINCE HE LOST A GREAT WAR IN THE EARLY DAYS OF HUMANITY, BEFORE ANY OF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW WERE BORN...THOUGH MAYBE AN ANCESTOR OR TWO FOUGHT."
YOU, YOUNG MAN, IN PARTICULAR, LOOK RATHER, HMM, FAMILIAR.
?

"THE FAE AREN'T INHERENTLY EVIL, THOUGH THERE IS A DARKNESS THAT HAS SPREAD OVER THE YEARS. DESPERATION DOES THAT."
MYSELF AND SOME LIKE-MINDED FRIENDS FROM VARIOUS REALMS DECIDED TO PUT A LOCK ON THE FAES.
WHY HELP US INSTEAD OF THE FAE?
THEY WERE THE AGGRESSORS. EARTH WAS DEFENSE-LESS.
WHY ARE YOU THE ONLY ONE HERE, THEN? WHAT ABOUT THESE FRIENDS OF YOURS?
LIFE DURING WARTIME CAN BE...WELL...

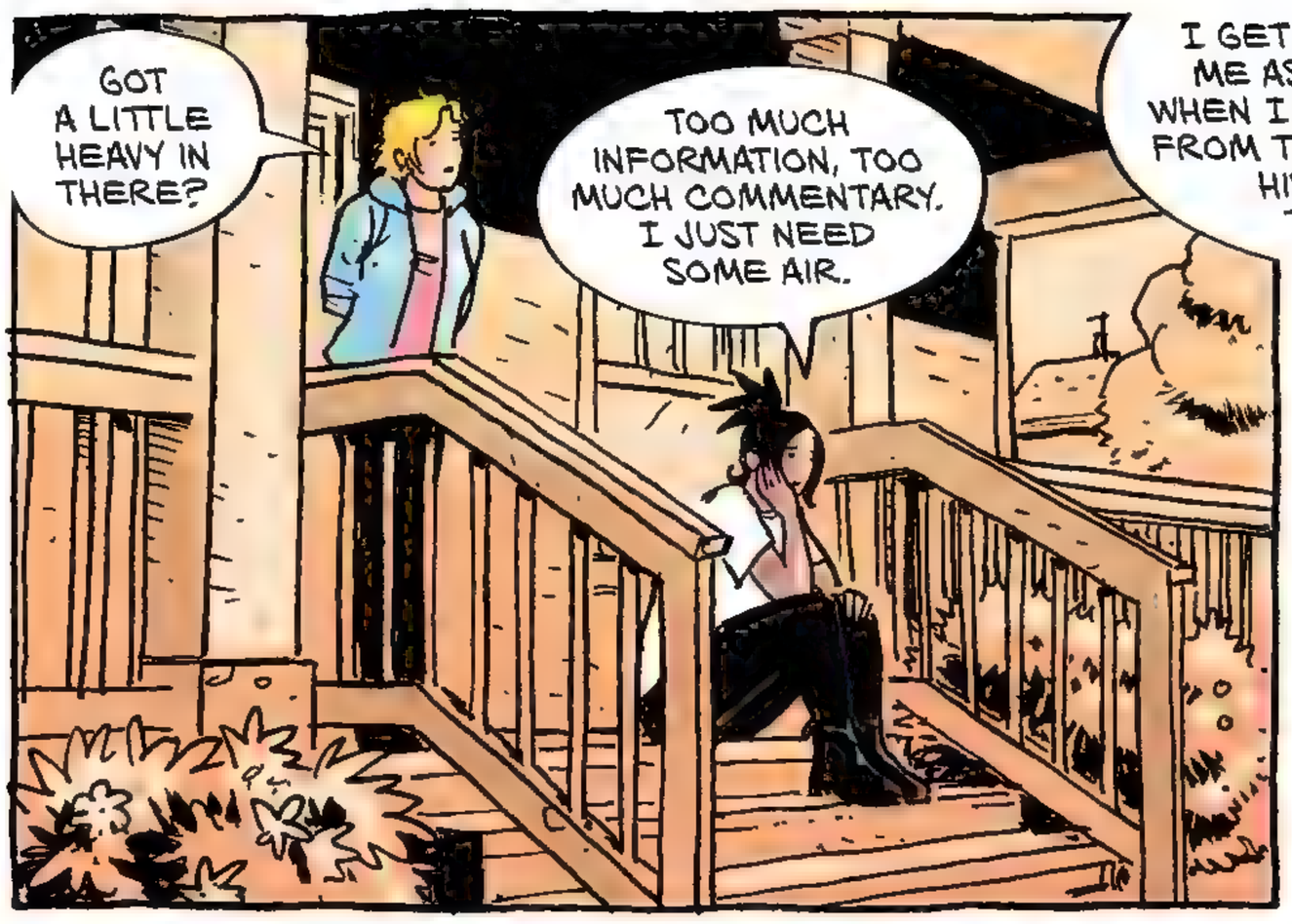
CLEARLY THEY ARE BREAKING THROUGH AGAIN. BUT WE HAVE RANI. THE KING, ER, LEADER WAS ALWAYS OUR CONTINGENCY BUT, FOR NOW, SECRET IS THE WATCHWORD.
SECRET? AGREED. THIS IS BIGGER THAN JUST MONSTERS AND WIZARDS.
I'M NOT SURE OUR GIRL IS READY FOR SUCH A BURDEN.
YOUR GIRL IS RIGHT HERE.

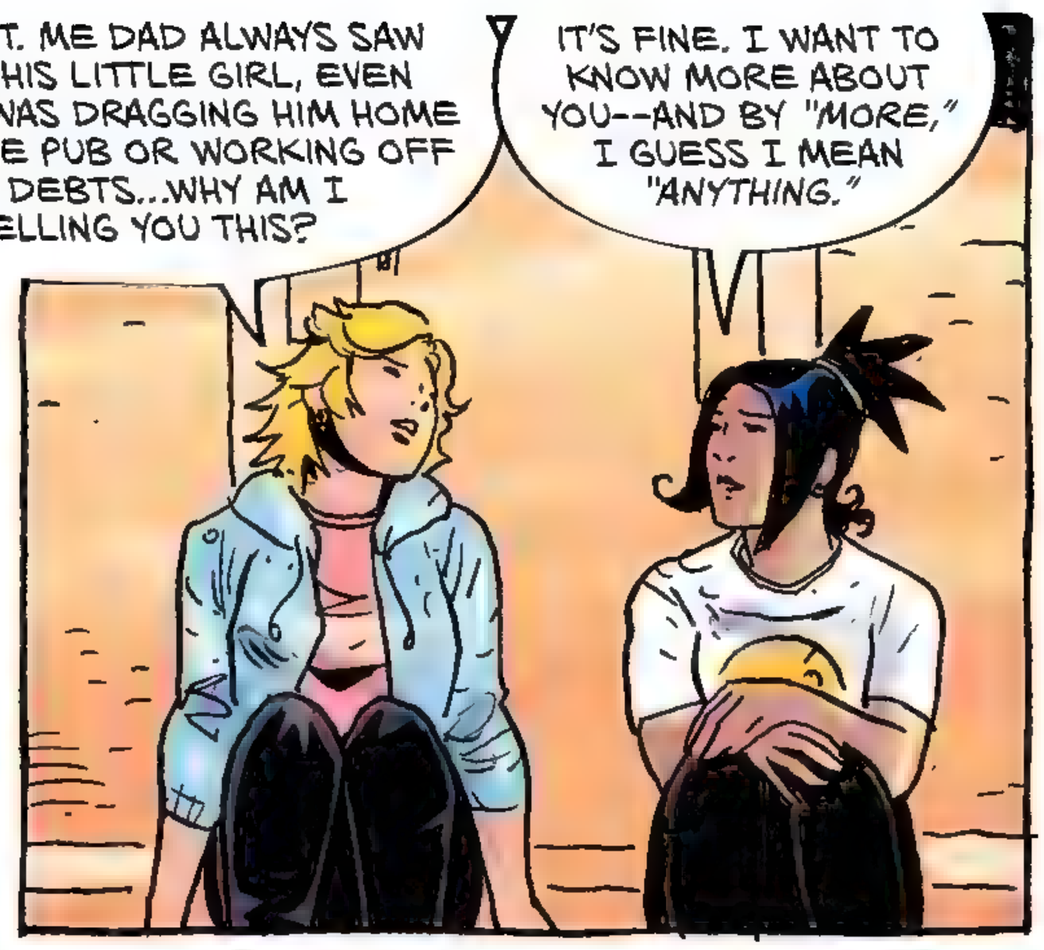

WHAT SECRET, THOUGH? THERE WERE PEOPLE AND CAMERAS AND PHONES ALL AROUND THE DINER.
I TOOK CARE OF THAT WITH MY SPELL EARLIER. WHAT WAS CALLED, HM, A "USELESS FLASH" ENSURED OUR ENCOUNTER WASN'T RECORDED ON TECHNOLOGICAL DEVICES.
THIS IS ALL TOO MUCH. IT'S TOO MUCH.
MAYBE WE SHOULD TAKE RANI AWAY, PERHAPS TO YOUR PARENTS', AT LEAST UNTIL--

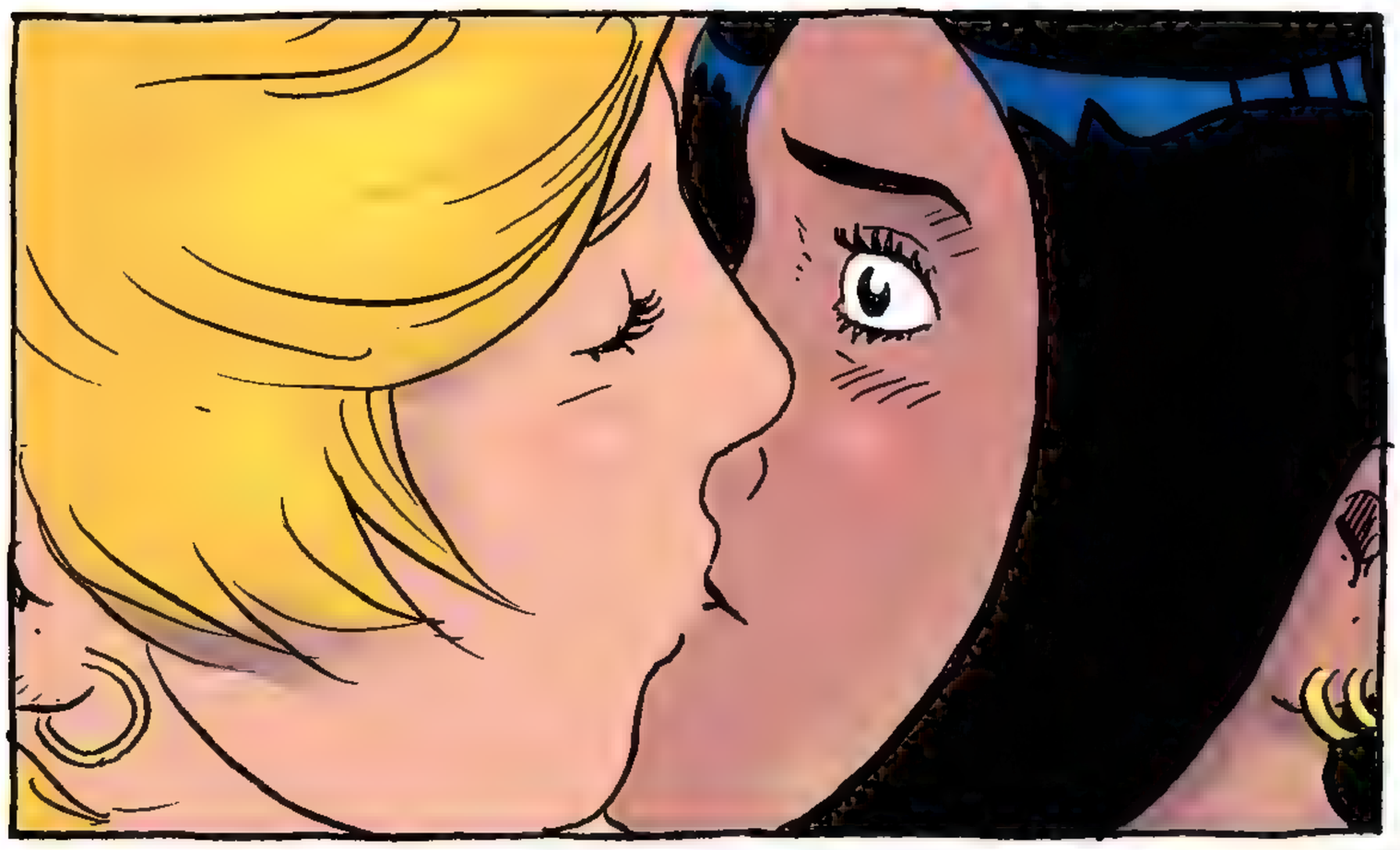
STOP TALKING ABOUT ME AS IF I'M NOT HERE.



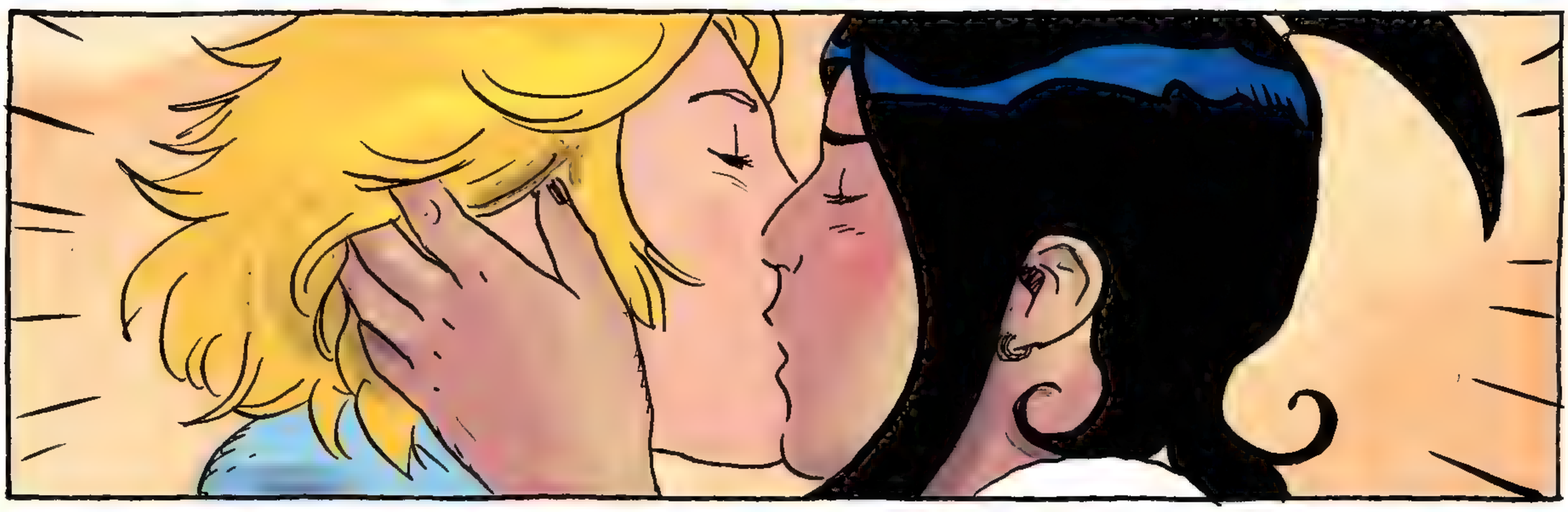
I'LL JUST... YEAH.

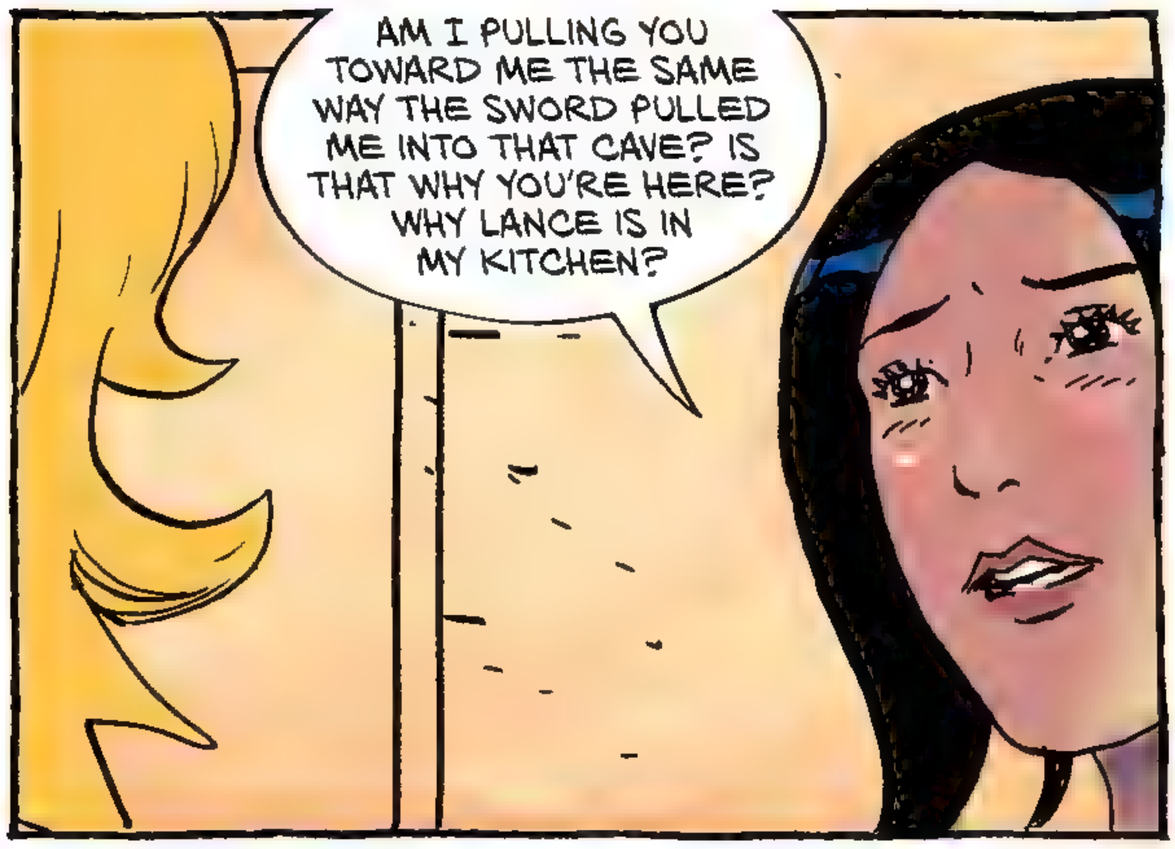

GOT A LITTLE HEAVY IN THERE?
TOO MUCH INFORMATION, TOO MUCH COMMENTARY. I JUST NEED SOME AIR.

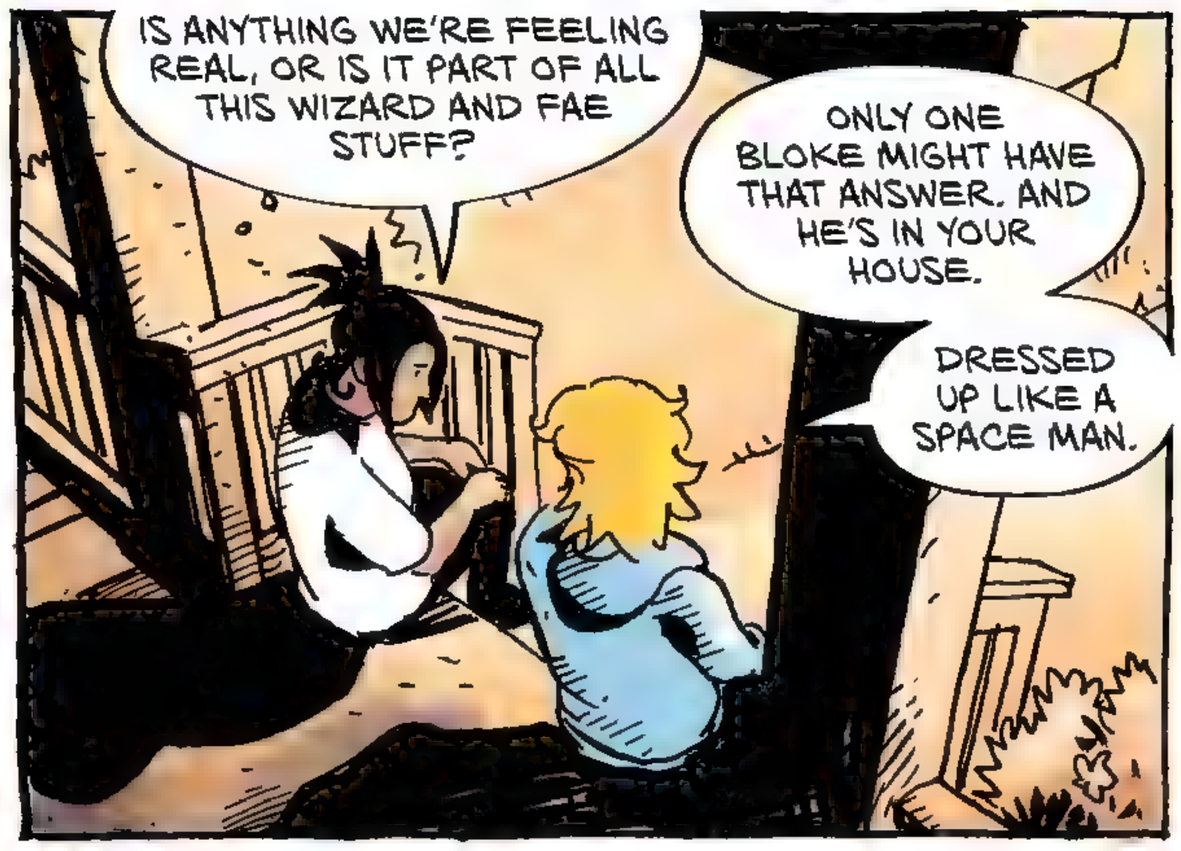

I GET IT. ME DAD ALWAYS SAW ME AS HIS LITTLE GIRL, EVEN WHEN I WAS DRAGGING HIM HOME FROM THE PUB OR WORKING OFF HIS DEBTS...WHY AM I TELLING YOU THIS?
IT'S FINE. I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU--AND BY "MORE," I GUESS I MEAN "ANYTHING."



WHY'D YOU DO THAT?
LOOKED LIKE YOU NEEDED IT. OR MAYBE I DID.

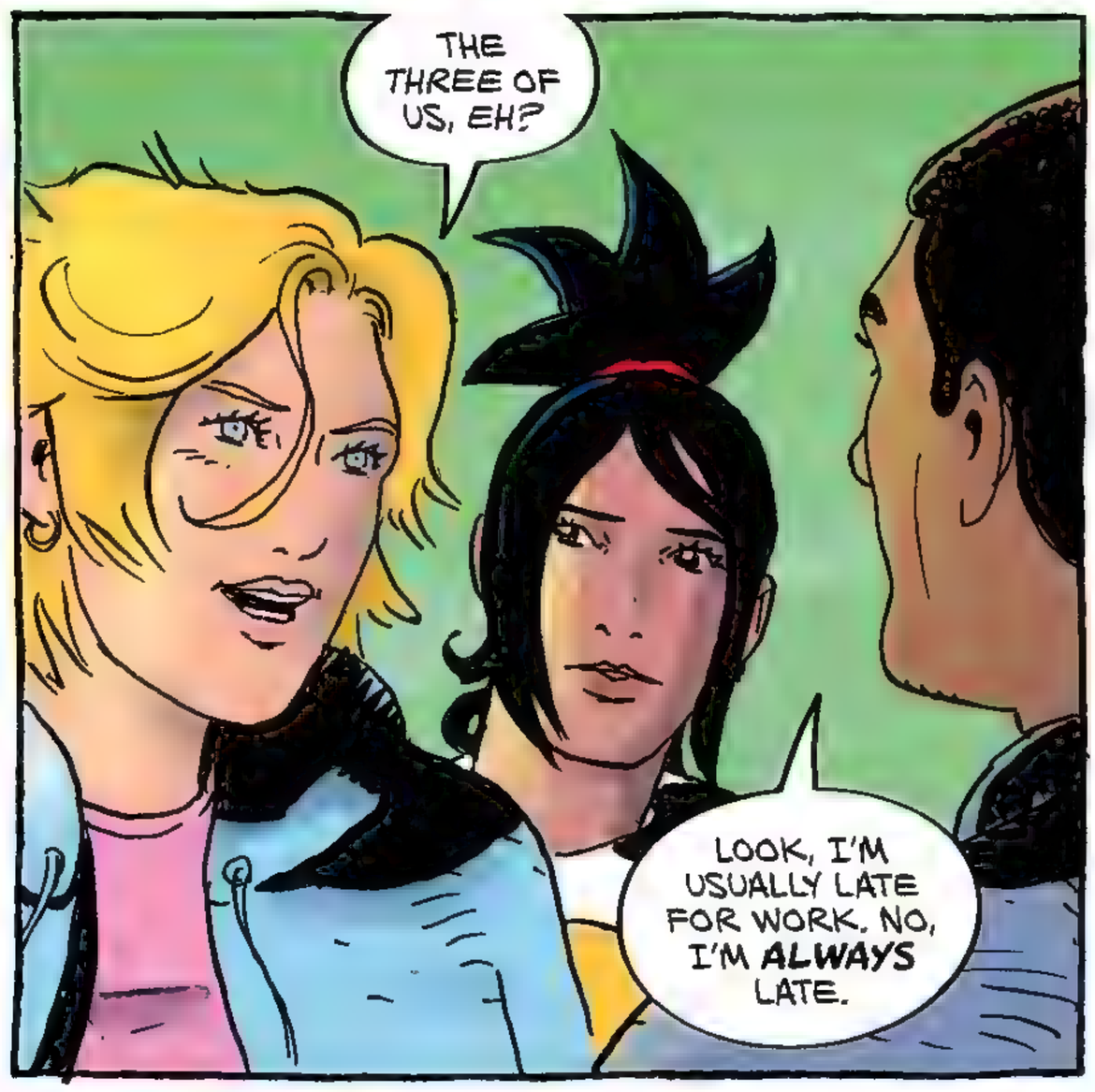



AM I PULLING YOU TOWARD ME THE SAME WAY THE SWORD PULLED ME INTO THAT CAVE? IS THAT WHY YOU'RE HERE? WHY LANCE IS IN MY KITCHEN?


IS ANYTHING WE'RE FEELING REAL, OR IS IT PART OF ALL THIS WIZARD AND FAE STUFF?
ONLY ONE BLOKE MIGHT HAVE THAT ANSWER. AND HE'S IN YOUR HOUSE.
DRESSED UP LIKE A SPACE MAN.

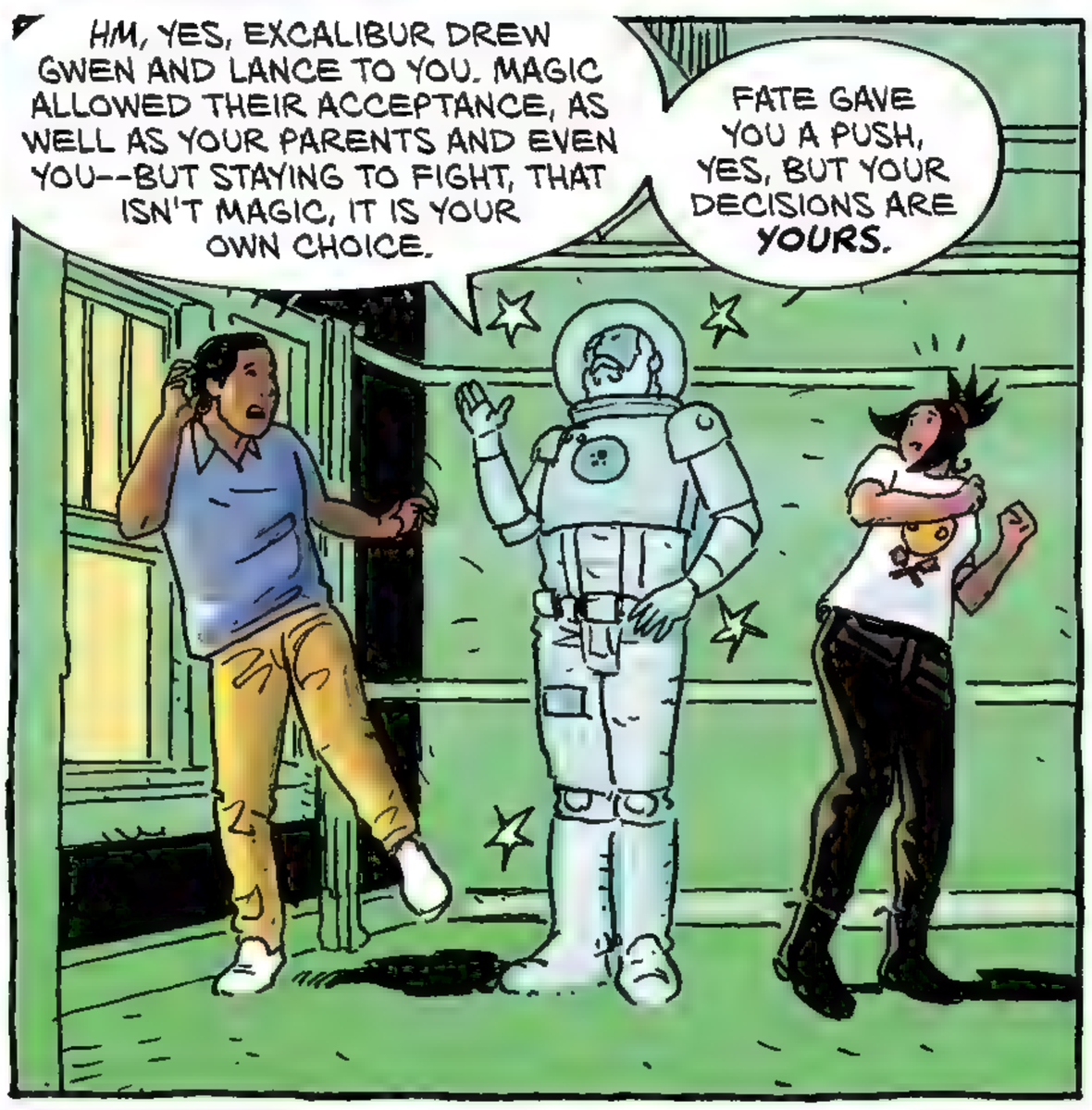
YOU LEAVIN', BIG MAN?
NO, I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU TWO.
I KNOW I...I KNOW I DIDN'T DO MUCH IN THAT FIGHT, BUT IT *FELT*...IT FELT LIKE WHAT I SHOULD BE DOING.

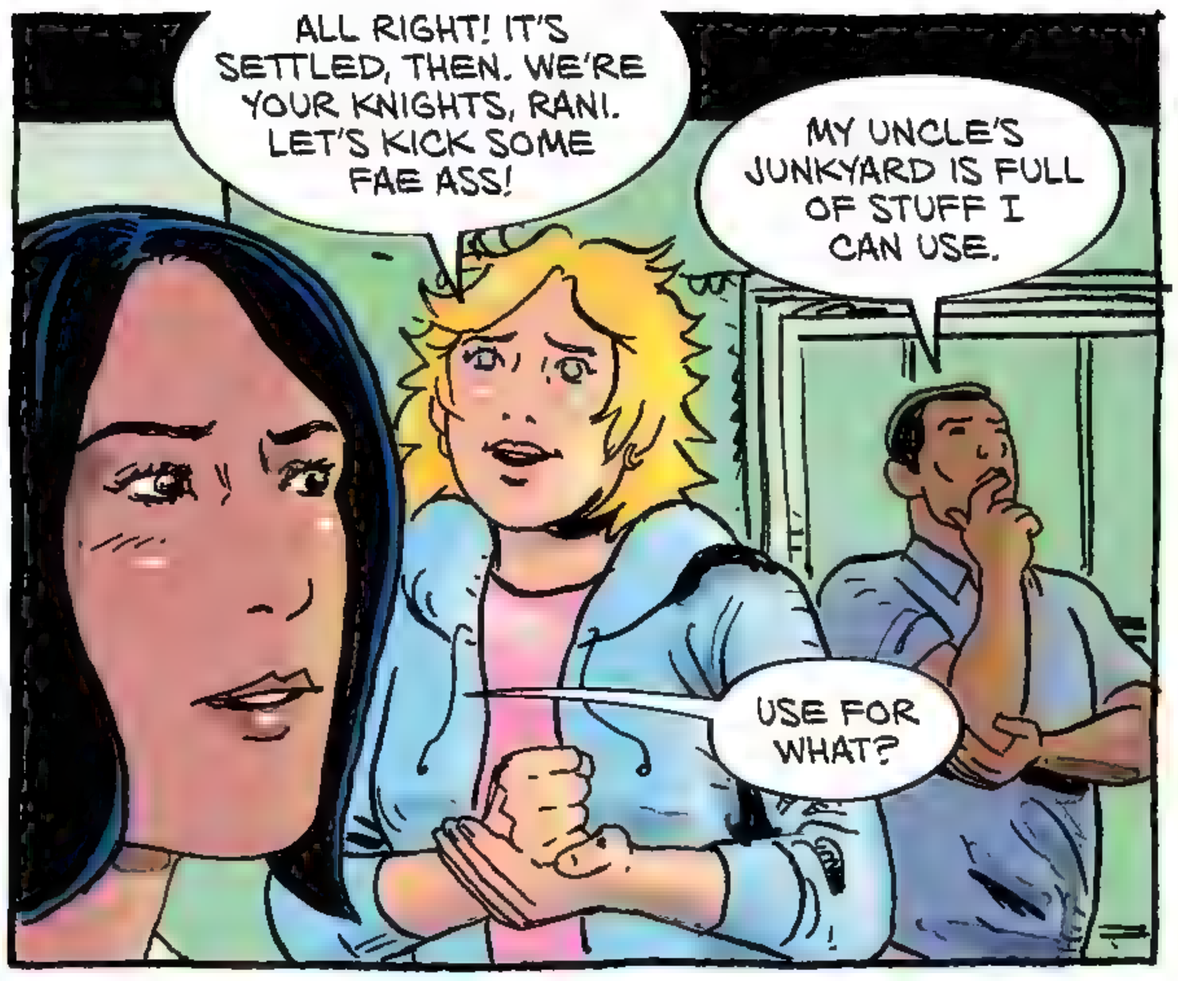
THE THREE OF US-- *TOGETHER.*

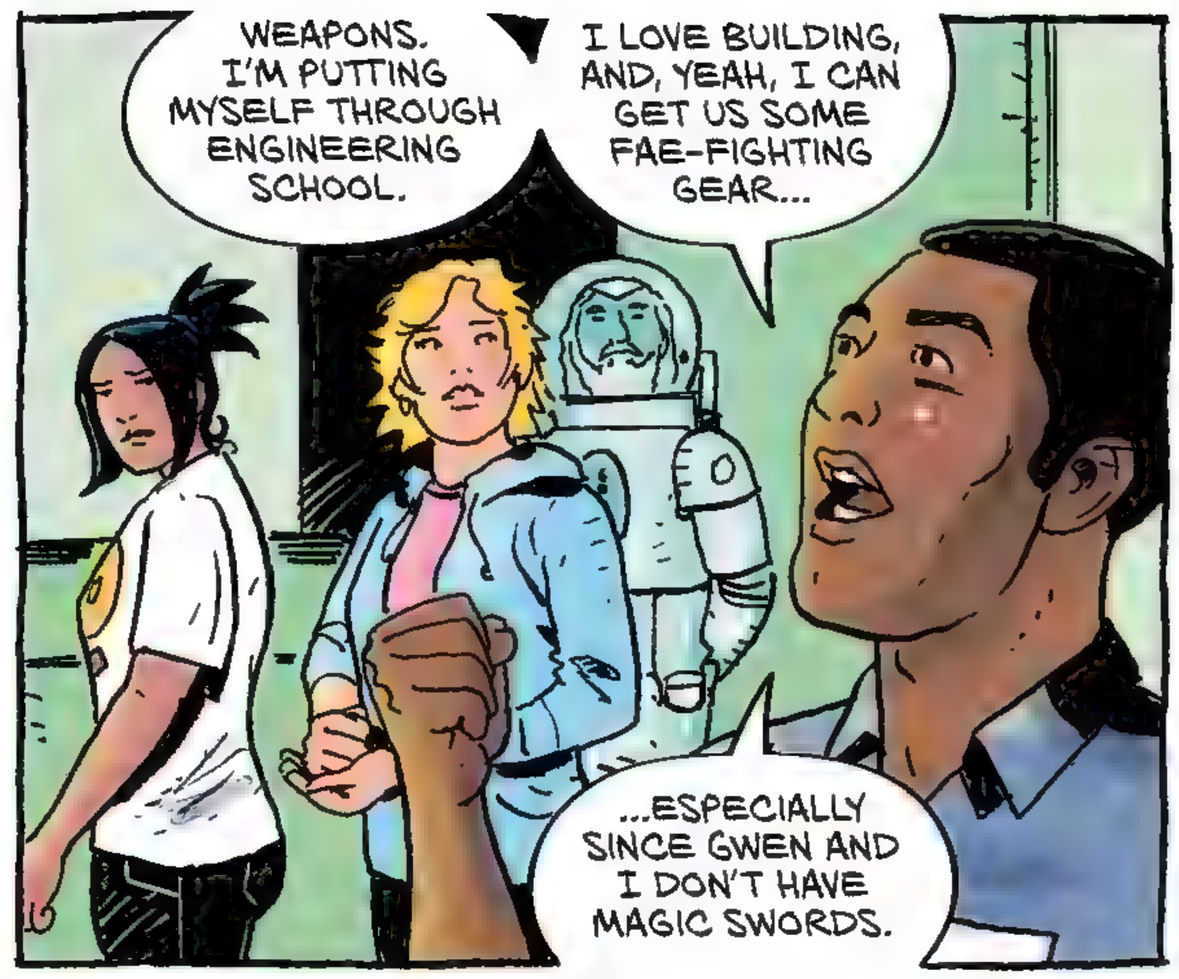

THE *THREE* OF US, EH?
LOOK, I'M USUALLY LATE FOR WORK. NO, I'M *ALWAYS* LATE.

BUT NOT THIS MORNING. I COULDN'T BE. I DIDN'T KNOW WHY...

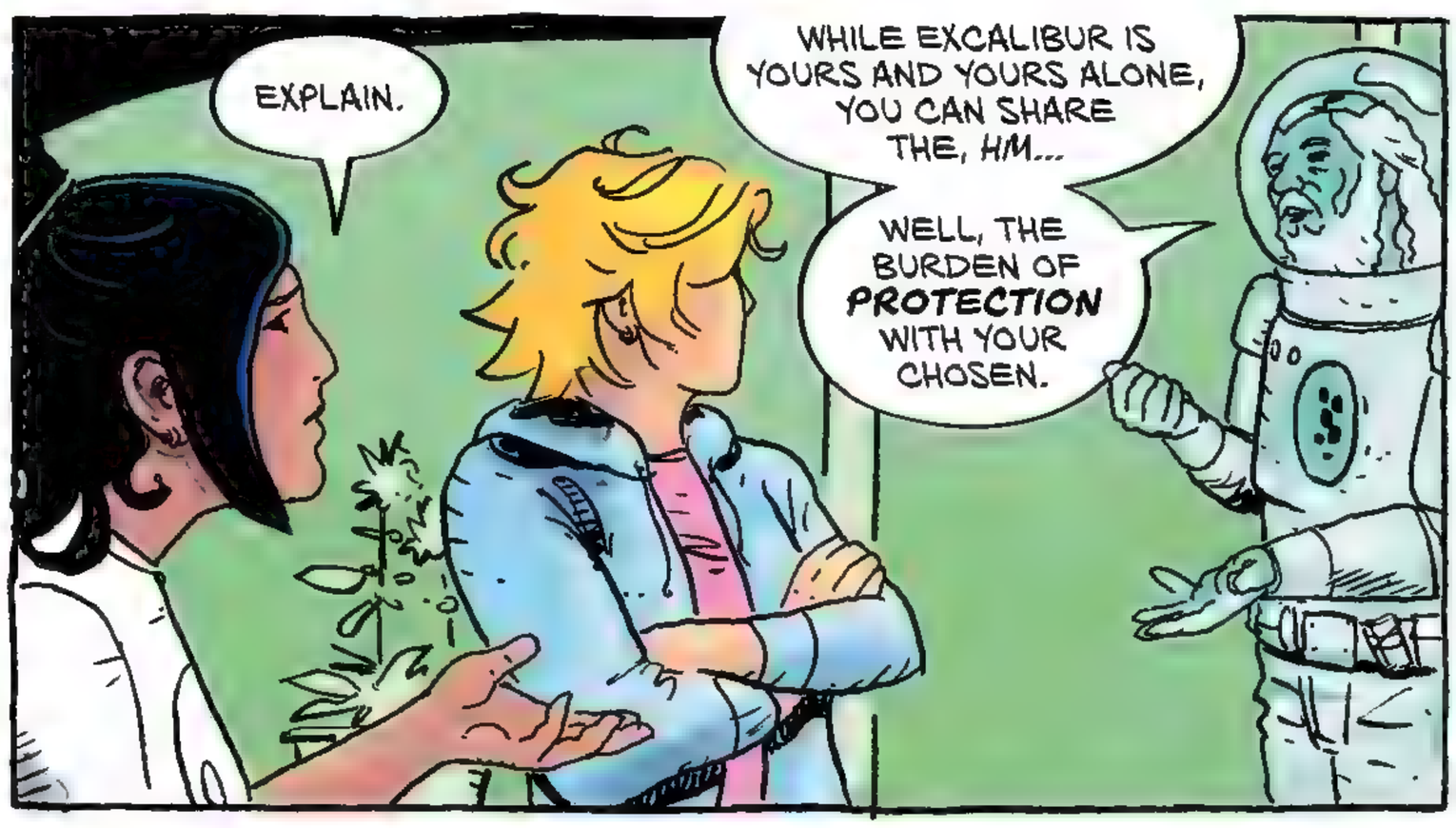
...UNTIL I SAW *YOU,* RANI.
YOU WERE PULLED TO ME. SO IT'S ALL THE MAGIC, THEN. ALL OF THIS...*INSANITY* HAPPENING AROUND US.

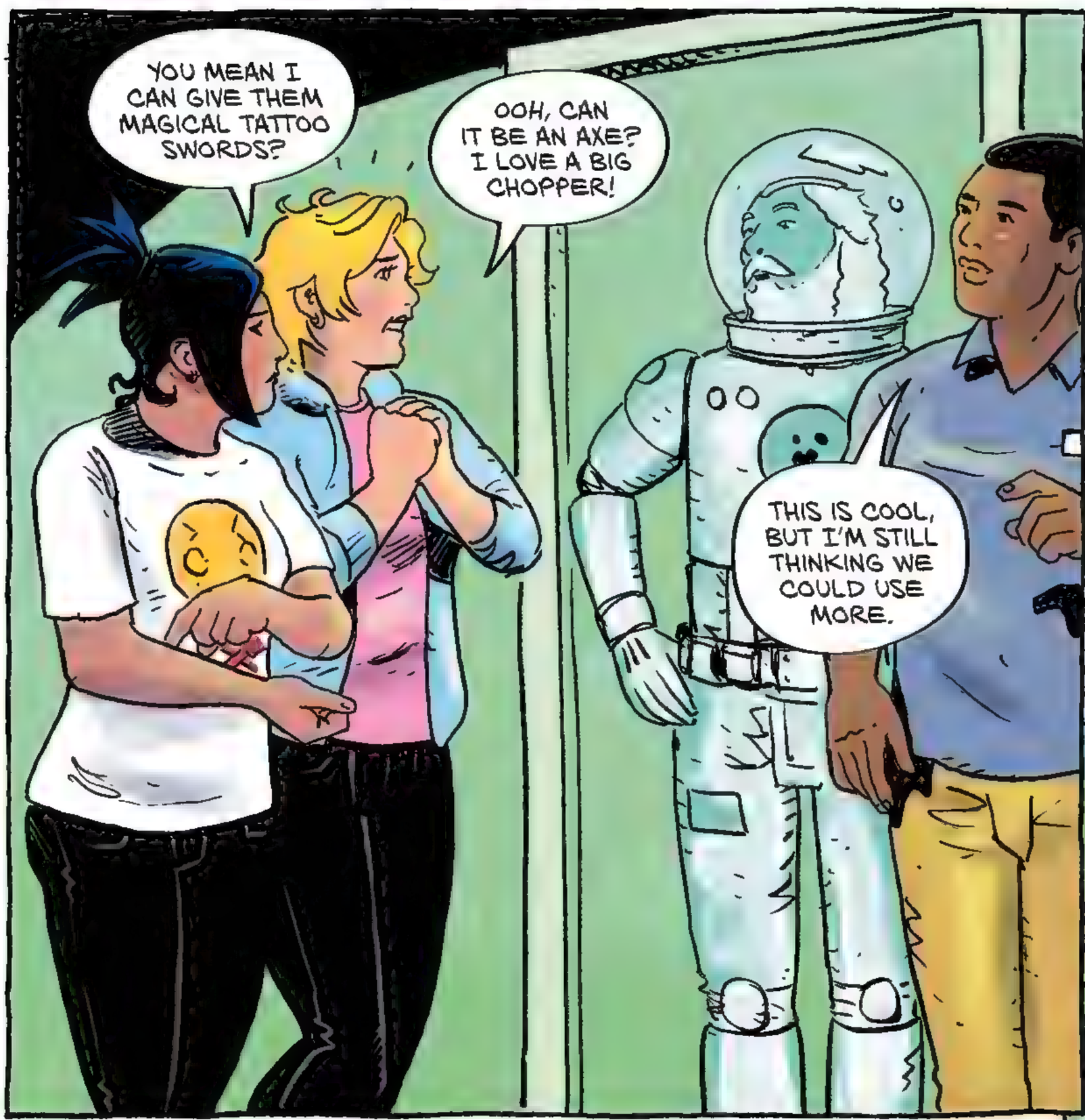

HM, YES, EXCALIBUR DREW GWEN AND LANCE TO YOU. MAGIC ALLOWED THEIR ACCEPTANCE, AS WELL AS YOUR PARENTS AND EVEN YOU--BUT STAYING TO FIGHT, THAT ISN'T MAGIC, IT IS YOUR OWN CHOICE.
FATE GAVE YOU A PUSH, YES, BUT YOUR DECISIONS ARE *YOURS.*

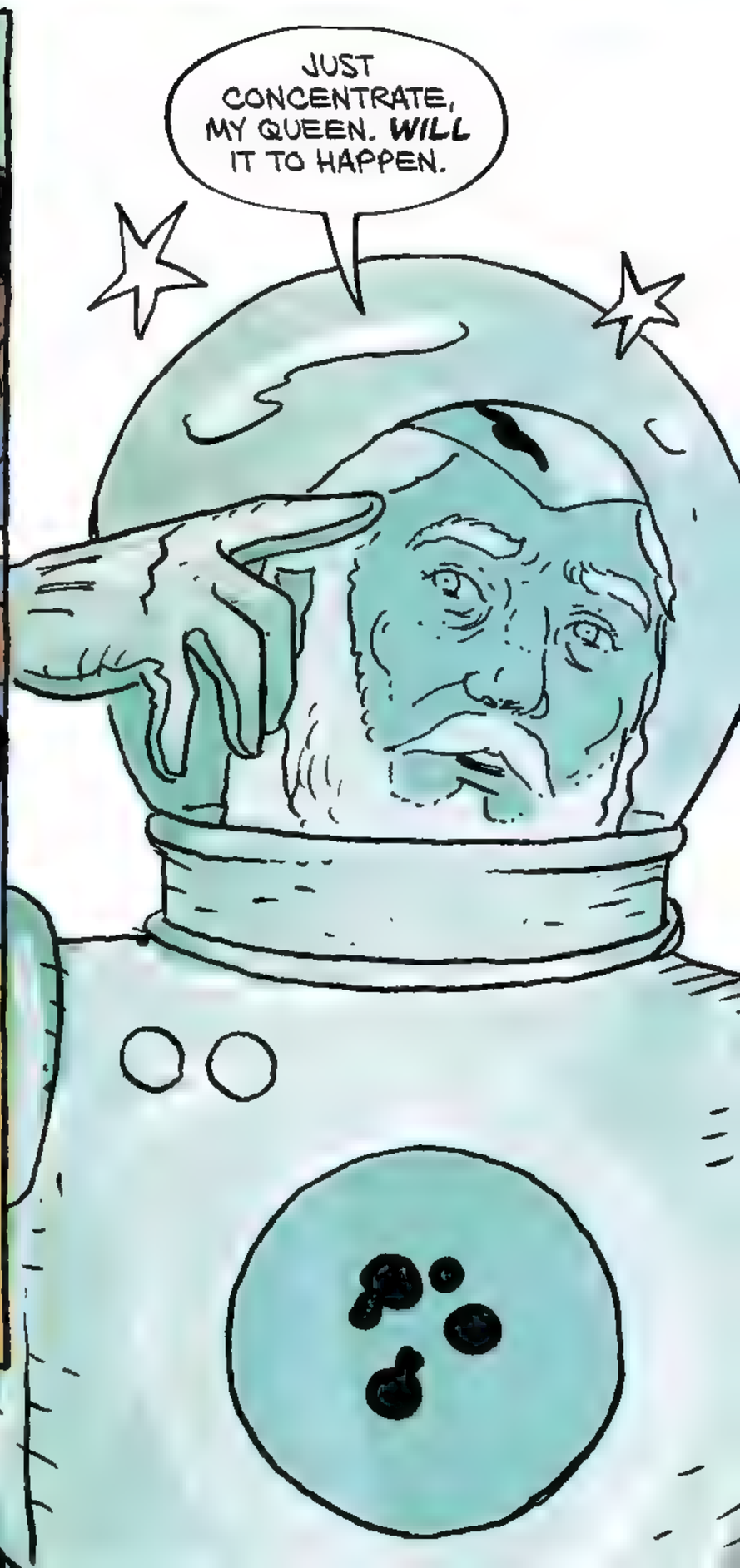

ALL RIGHT! IT'S SETTLED, THEN. WE'RE YOUR KNIGHTS, RANI. LET'S KICK SOME FAE ASS!
MY UNCLE'S JUNKYARD IS FULL OF STUFF I CAN USE.
USE FOR WHAT?


WEAPONS. I'M PUTTING MYSELF THROUGH ENGINEERING SCHOOL.
I LOVE BUILDING, AND, YEAH, I CAN GET US SOME FAE-FIGHTING GEAR...
...ESPECIALLY SINCE GWEN AND I DON'T HAVE MAGIC SWORDS.

AH, YES, WELL, THAT'S ONLY BECAUSE YOUR QUEEN HAS YET TO BESTOW THEM.


EXPLAIN.
WHILE EXCALIBUR IS YOURS AND YOURS ALONE, YOU CAN SHARE THE, HM...
WELL, THE BURDEN OF PROTECTION WITH YOUR CHOSEN.

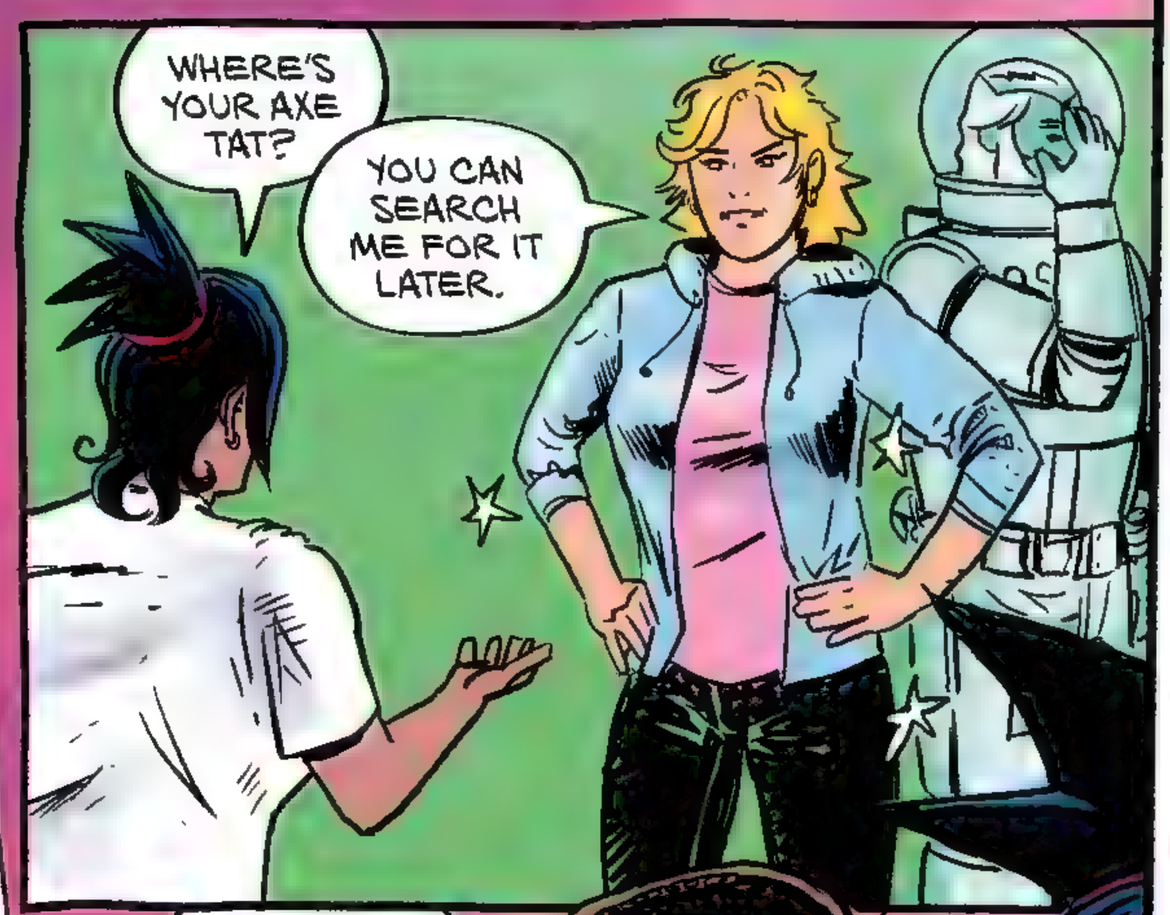

YOU MEAN I CAN GIVE THEM MAGICAL TATTOO SWORDS?
OOH, CAN IT BE AN AXE? I LOVE A BIG CHOPPER!
THIS IS COOL, BUT I'M STILL THINKING WE COULD USE MORE.

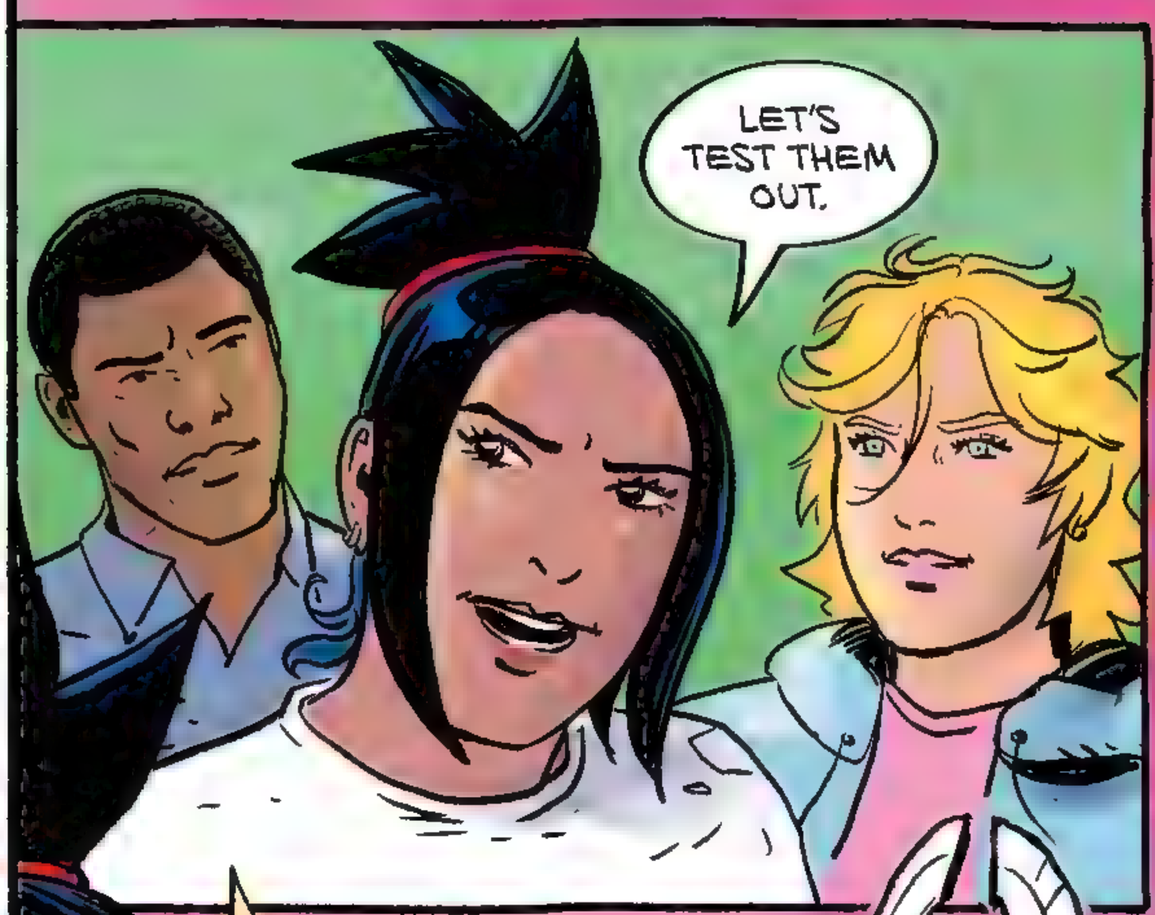

JUST CONCENTRATE, MY QUEEN. WILL IT TO HAPPEN.

LIKE THIS...?
NOW THIS WILL DO NICELY!
WHAT ABOUT YOU, LANCE? ANY REQUESTS?
UH, I'M FINE WITH WHATEVER.
EXCALIBUR CAN CHOOSE.
OKAY...
AH, HEY, THIS FEELS RIGHT!
DOES IT NOW?
THAT'S A BIG OL' SWORD, LANCEY.
HEH. NICE AXE.
AND THEY CAN...?
INDEED THEY CAN.

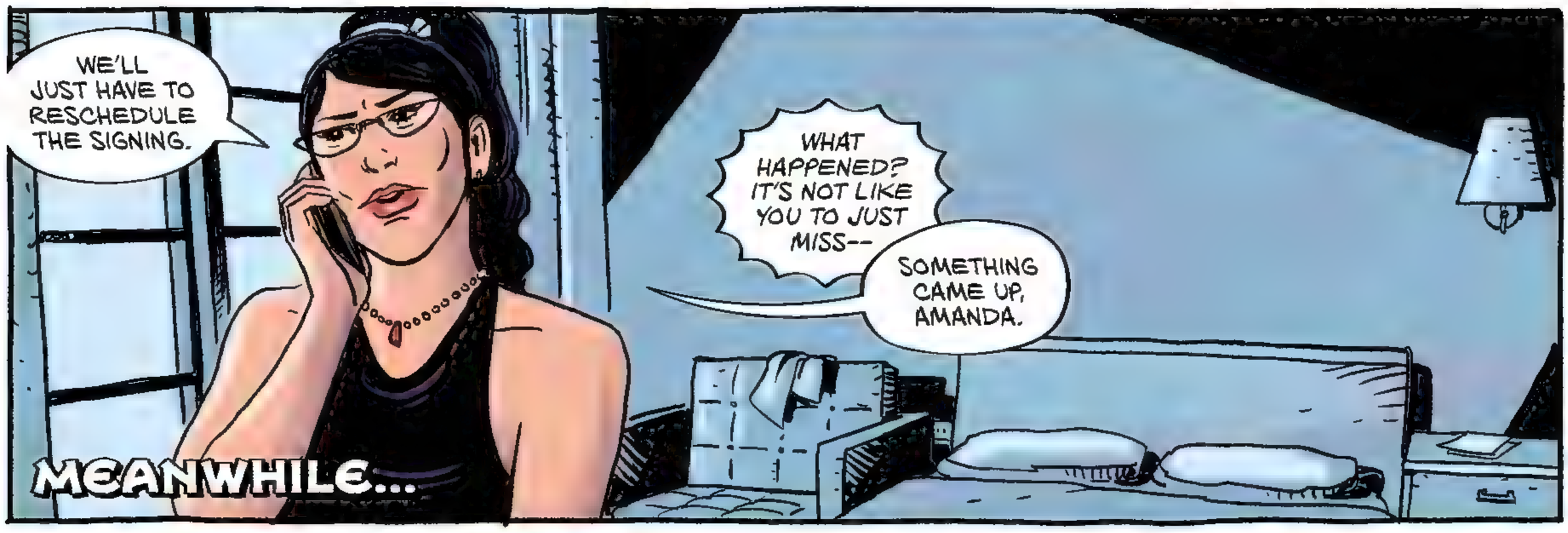
YOUR WEAPONS ARE, WELL, THEY'RE *IDEAS*, I GUESS?
YOU CAN MAKE THEM TAKE AN EASIER-TO-CARRY FORM. I CHOSE A TATTOO. SEEMS CONVENIENT.
IN THIS EARTH ERA, IN THIS CITY IN PARTICULAR, YES.

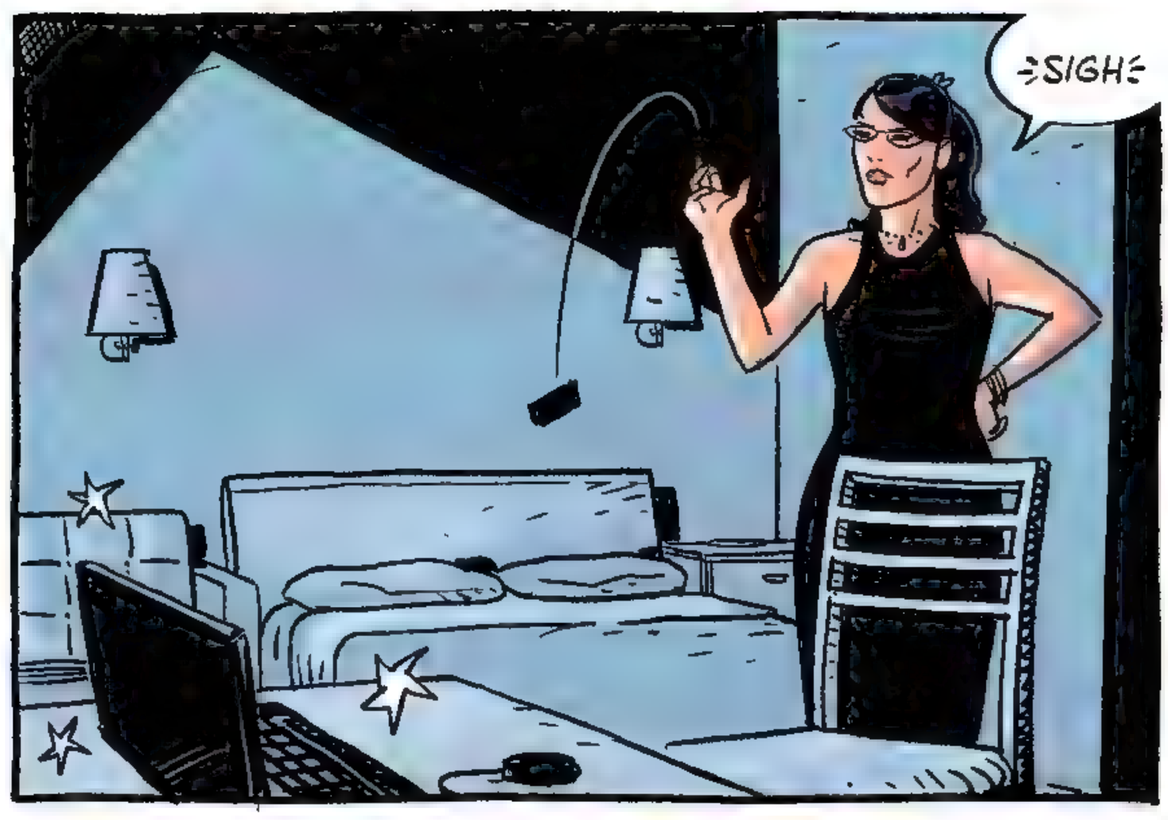
WHOA! IT ITCHES.


WHERE'S YOUR AXE TAT?
YOU CAN SEARCH ME FOR IT LATER.

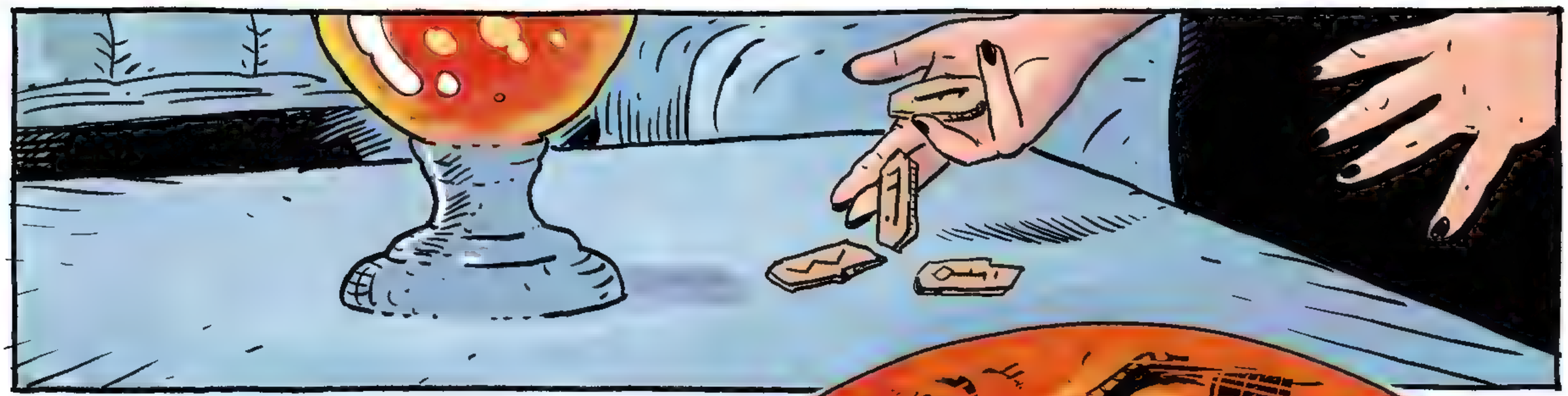

LET'S TEST THEM OUT.

OH GREAT, THEY'RE ALL **ARMED** NOW.


WE'LL JUST HAVE TO RESCHEDULE THE SIGNING.
WHAT HAPPENED? IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO JUST MISS--
SOMETHING CAME UP, AMANDA.
MEANWHILE...


SIGH

FELP



WHERE ARE YOU, EXCALIBUR? WHERE'S YOUR NEW LITTLE VESSEL...?
THAT DAMN WIZARD MUST BE HIDING HER.

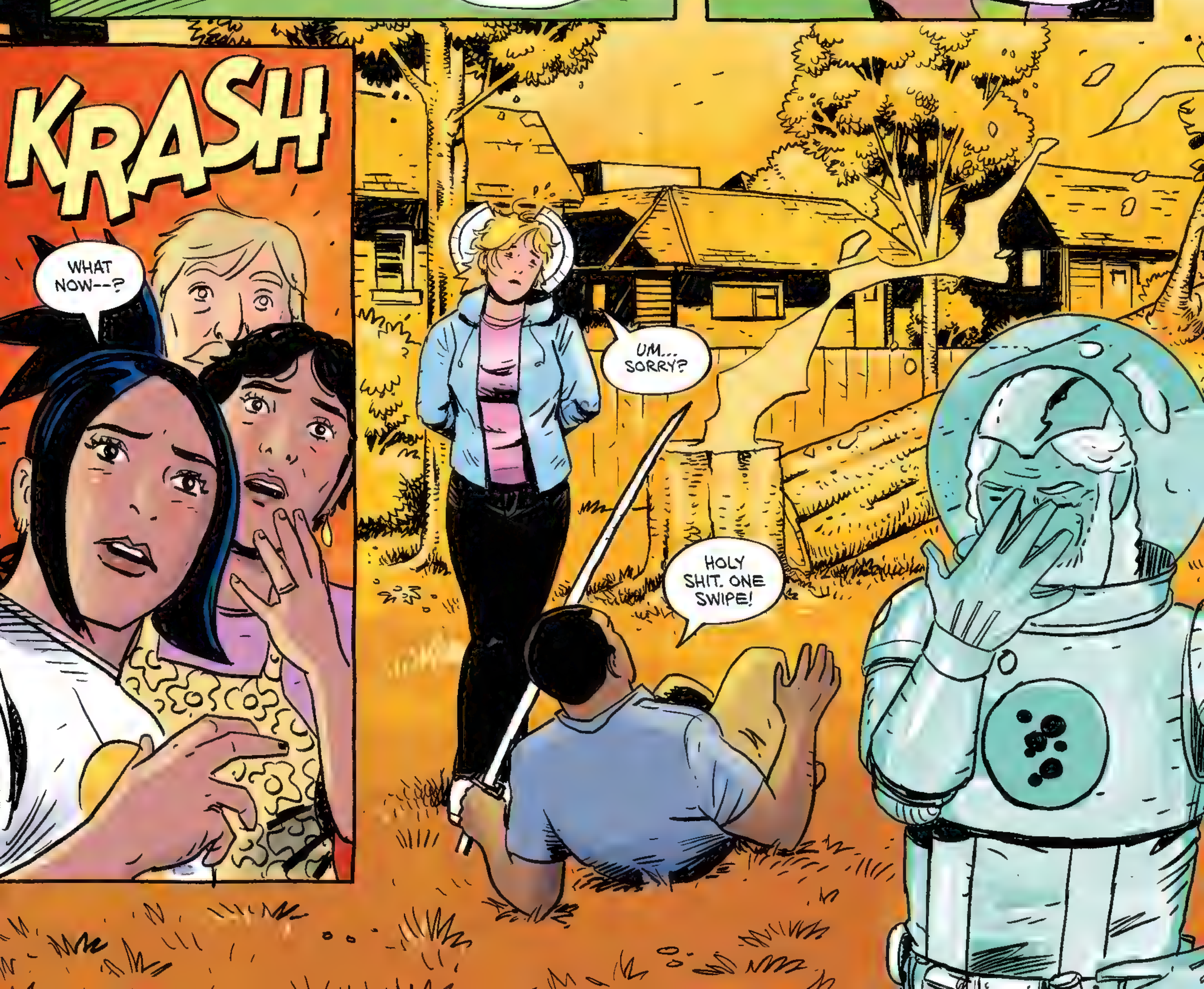
WHAT PROGRESS, MORGANA?

GOOD, MORGANA. THE DARKNESS AND THE BLOOD SING OF YOUR VICTORY.

C-CAREFUL. JUST, AHM, JUST SPARRING, YES?

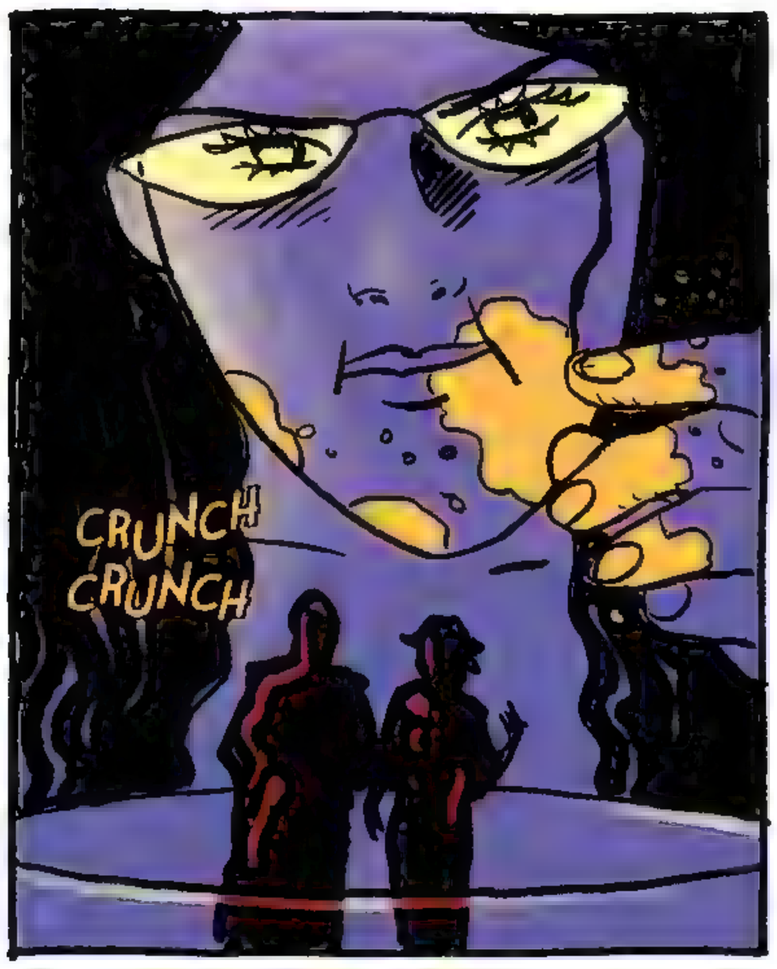
YOU TWO ARE TAKING ALL OF THIS SHOCKINGLY WELL.
IS THAT THE IMPRESSION WE'RE GIVING?
I'M NOT SURE WE HAVE A CHOICE. WE CAN'T STOP THIS. WE HATE IT, BUT WE CAN'T STOP IT.

THERE'S NO DENYING ALL OF THIS MADNESS, AND WE DON'T WANT YOU TO GO THROUGH IT ALONE.


KRASH
WHAT NOW--?
UM... SORRY?
HOLY SHIT. ONE SWIPE!

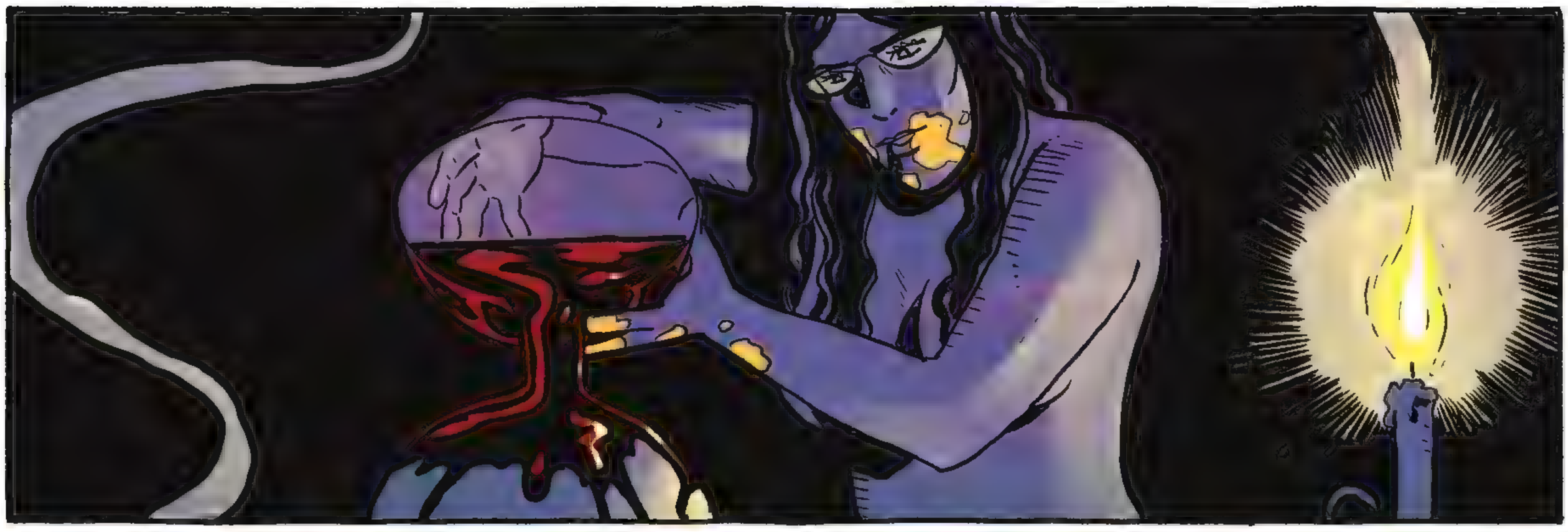
CHEEZY

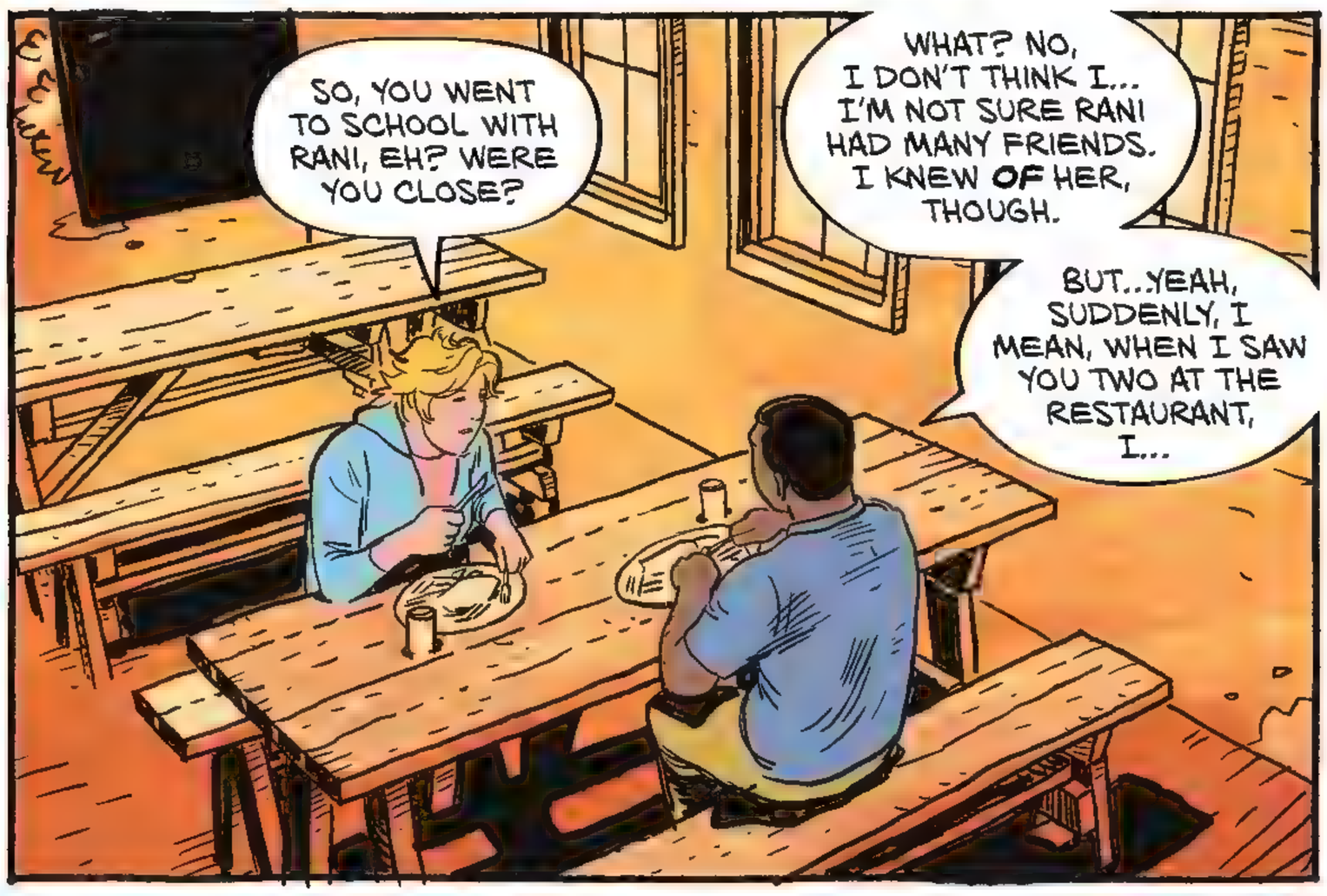
YOU LET THEM GET TOO FAR AWAY FROM YOU, MERLIN...


CRUNCH CRUNCH

YEAH, RANI AND HER FOLKS COULD USE SOME SPACE FOR A BIT.
AND MERLIN CAN FIX THAT OLD TREE, RIGHT?

I'M STARVING. YOU?
I'VE BEEN WANTING TO EAT SINCE BEFORE I MET YOU, MATE!
Portland's Best



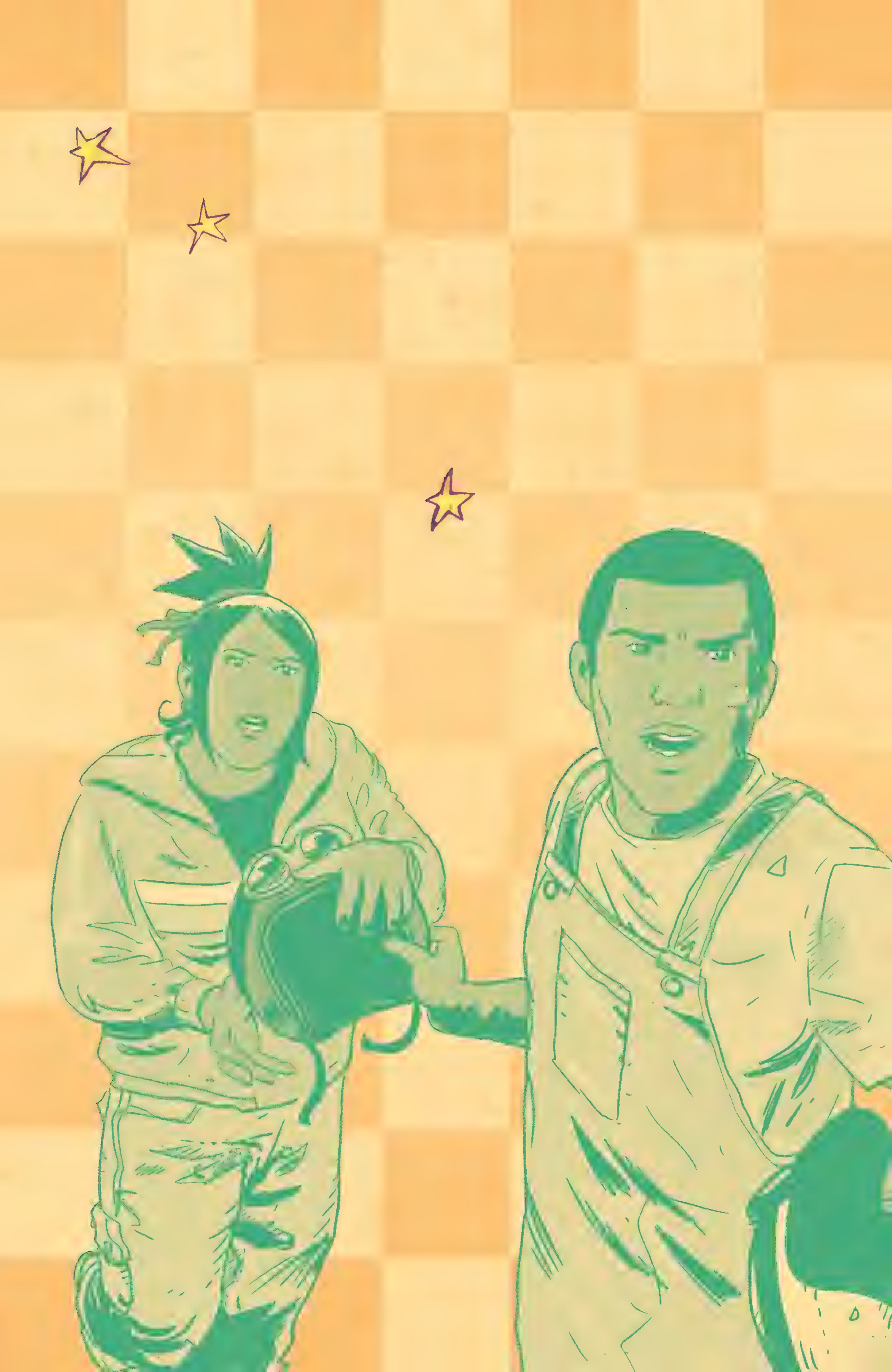

SO, YOU WENT TO SCHOOL WITH RANI, EH? WERE YOU CLOSE?
WHAT? NO, I DON'T THINK I... I'M NOT SURE RANI HAD MANY FRIENDS. I KNEW OF HER, THOUGH.
BUT...YEAH, SUDDENLY, I MEAN, WHEN I SAW YOU TWO AT THE RESTAURANT, I...

YOU WHAT?

I DON'T... I DUNNO.
NOTHING.

THE KING SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS.
IT'LL BUY ME SOME TRUST.

CHAPTER THREE



MOUNT HOOD, OREGON, USA

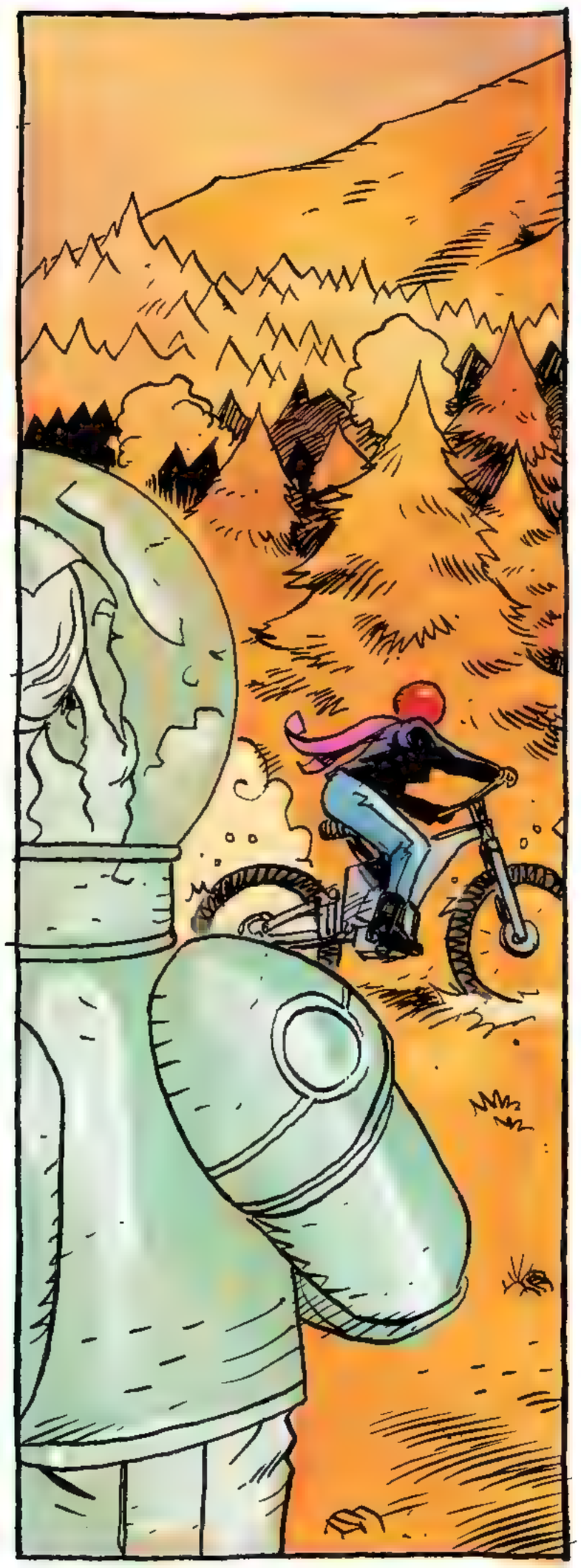
WE SURE THIS IS A GOOD IDEA?

VRRRRR

LAST TIME THE FAE HAD US PINNED DOWN, STUCK WITH INNOCENTS WHO COULD'VE BEEN ***HURT.***

WITH THESE BIKES LANCE MODIFIED, WE CAN TAKE THE FIGHT SOMEWHERE LESS CROWDED.

ALSO, C'MON, THEY'RE JUST PLAIN ***COOL,*** RIGHT?



CAN'T YOU JUST DEAL WITH THIS FAE INVASION-- JUST ***MAGIC*** IT AWAY?

THAT'S NOT WHAT, *HM*--WHEN YOU PULLED THE SWORD, YOU HELPED OPEN THE DOORS.

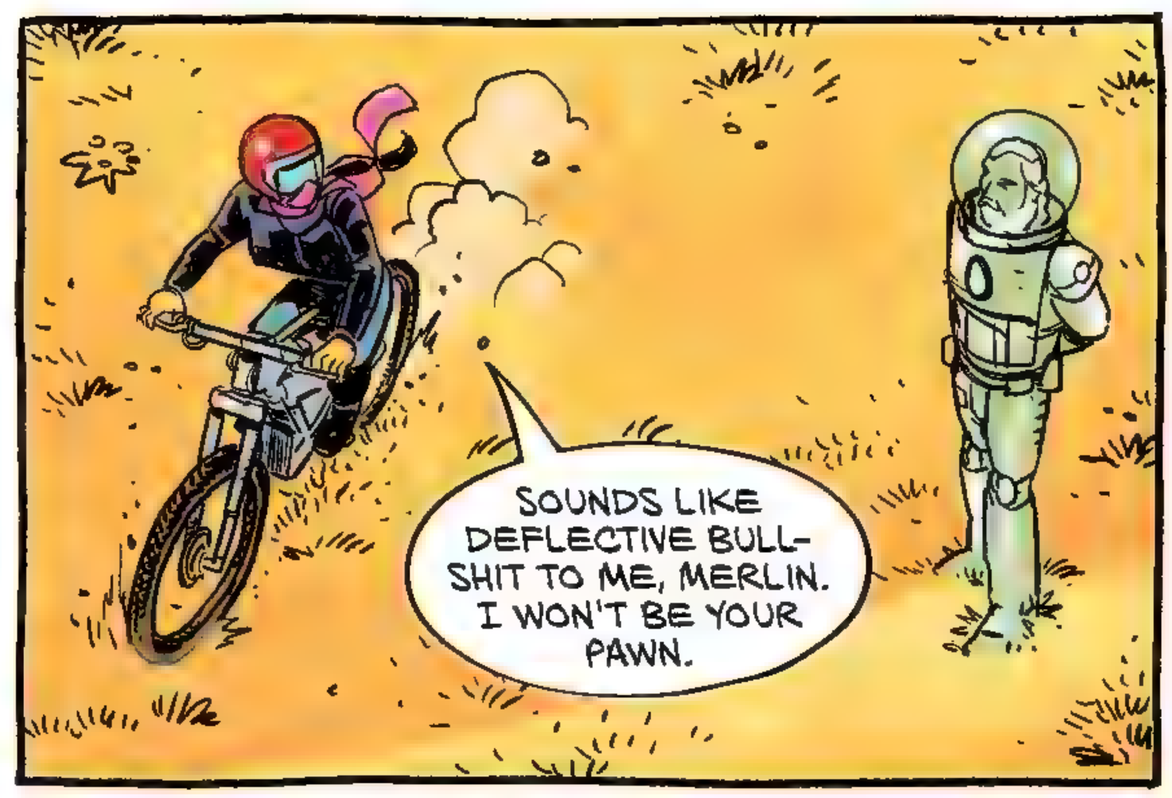
BUT THIS IS ***YOUR*** FIGHT, HUMANITY'S, NOT, *AH,* MINE.

HOW IS HUMANITY'S FIGHT NOT YOURS? AND WHY THE HELL WOULD PULLING EXCALIBUR MAKE THE PROBLEM IT'S SUPPOSED TO ***FIGHT*** HAPPEN?

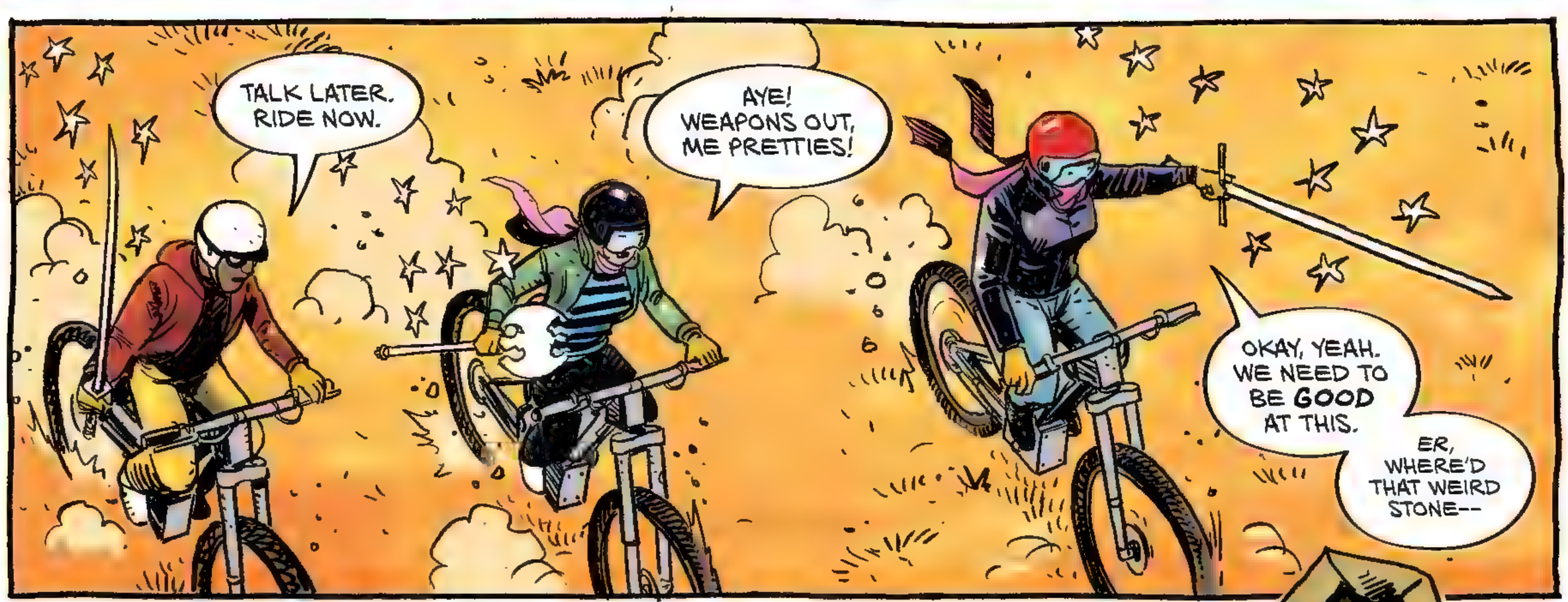
I ONLY WANT PEACE, AND, *HM,* YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE-SIDED PEACE. I HOPED THE TRUE, *AHHH,* ***YOU*** WOULD, ***CAN*** FIND NONVIOLENT MEANS.

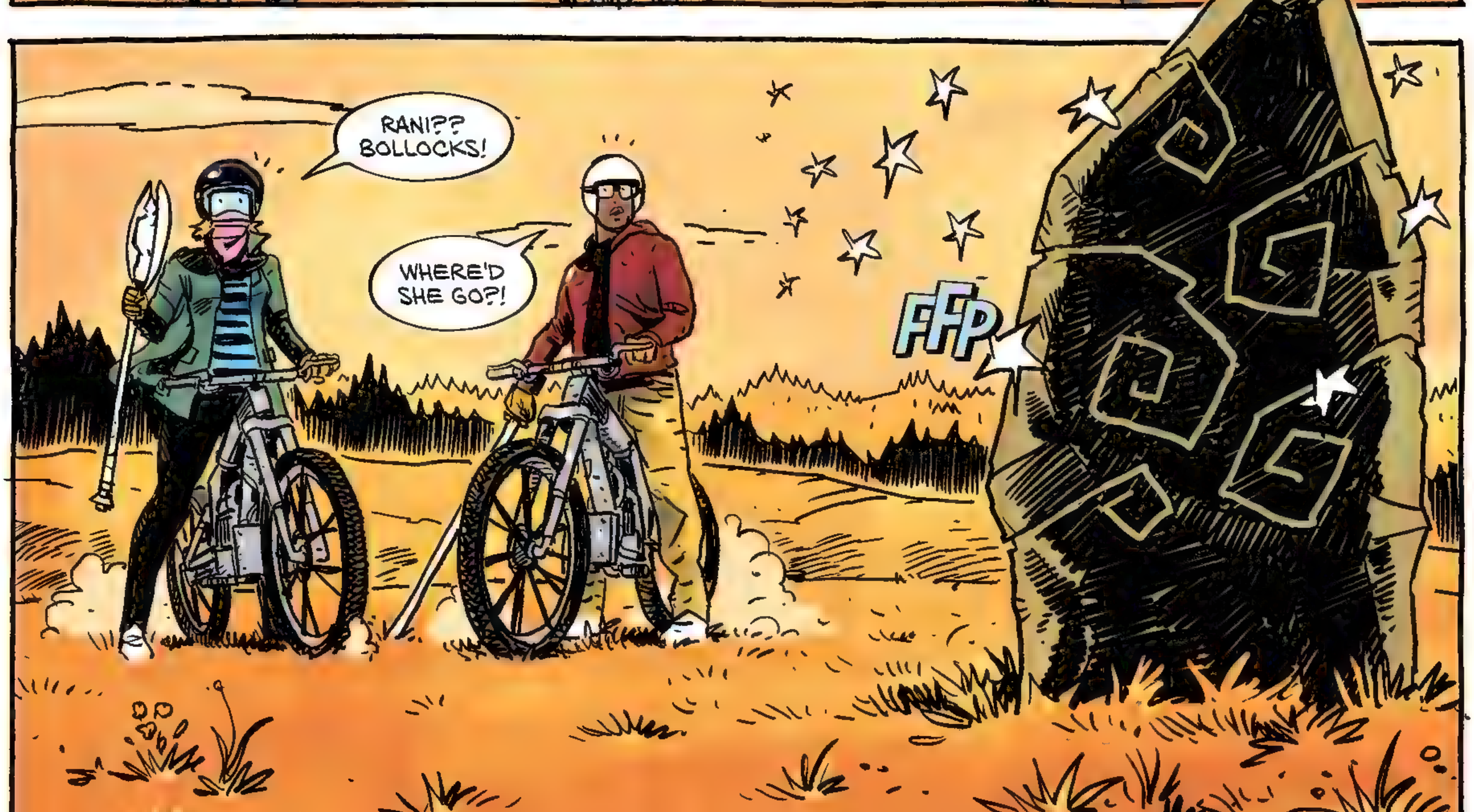
IT DOESN'T MEAN I DIDN'T PREPARE FOR THAT TO FAIL.

I'M TRYING TO PLAY YOUR GAME AND CAN ONLY SEE HALF THE BOARD! YOU HAVE ME START A WAR, AND THEN TELL ME THE GOAL IS PEACE...WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?
HOPE. MY GREATEST SIN.

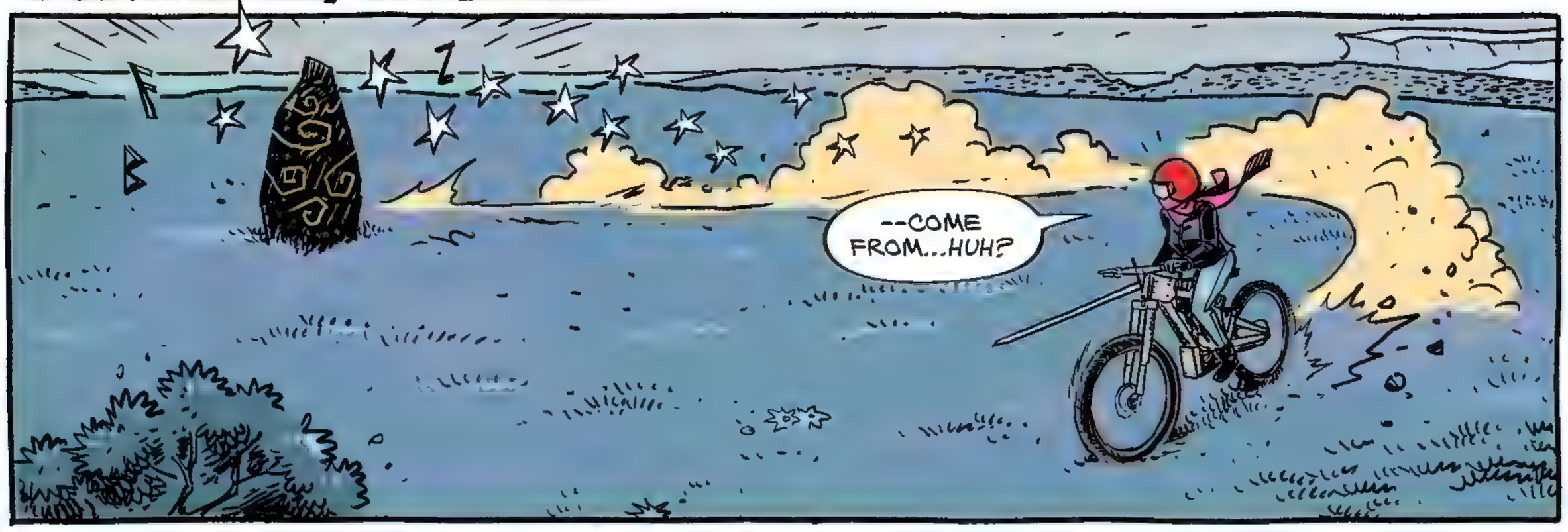

SOUNDS LIKE DEFLECTIVE BULL-SHIT TO ME, MERLIN. I WON'T BE YOUR PAWN.

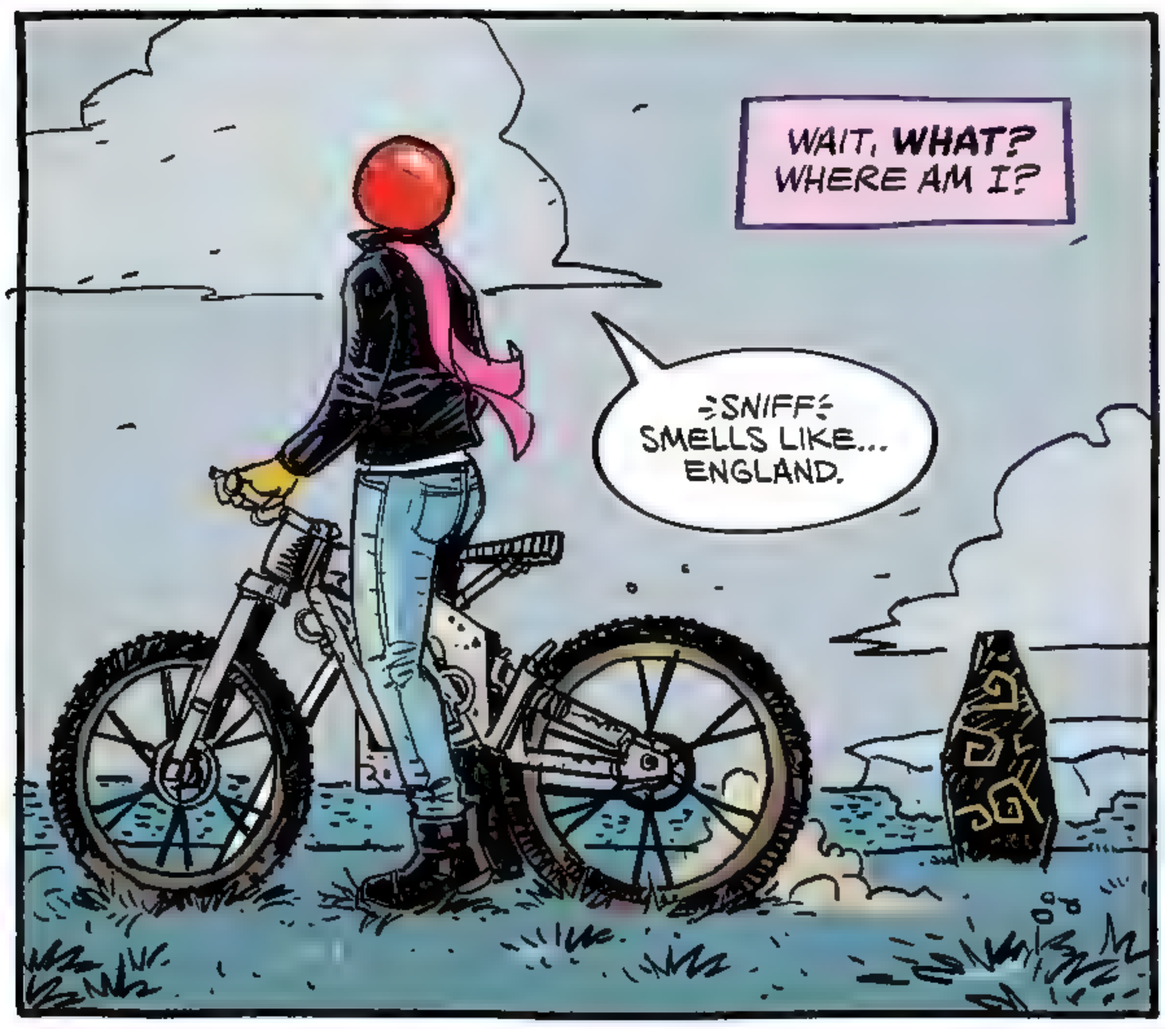
ARE YOU TWO GETTING THE HANG OF MY MOTORBIKES?
YOU'RE POSITIVELY GIDDY, AREN'T YOU, LANCE?
GUYS, WE NEED TO TALK.

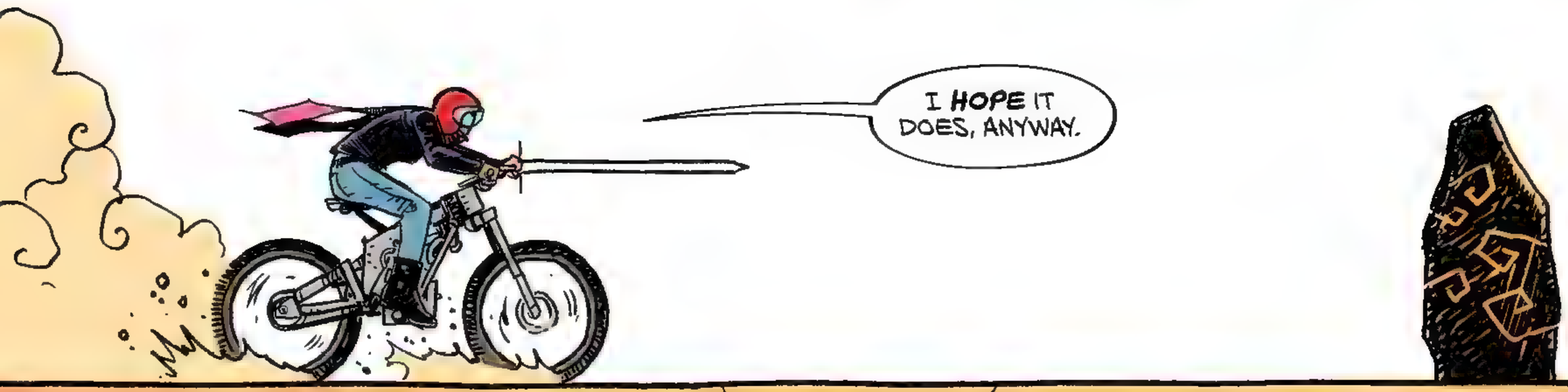

TALK LATER. RIDE NOW.
AYE! WEAPONS OUT, ME PRETTIES!
OKAY, YEAH. WE NEED TO BE GOOD AT THIS.
ER, WHERE'D THAT WEIRD STONE--

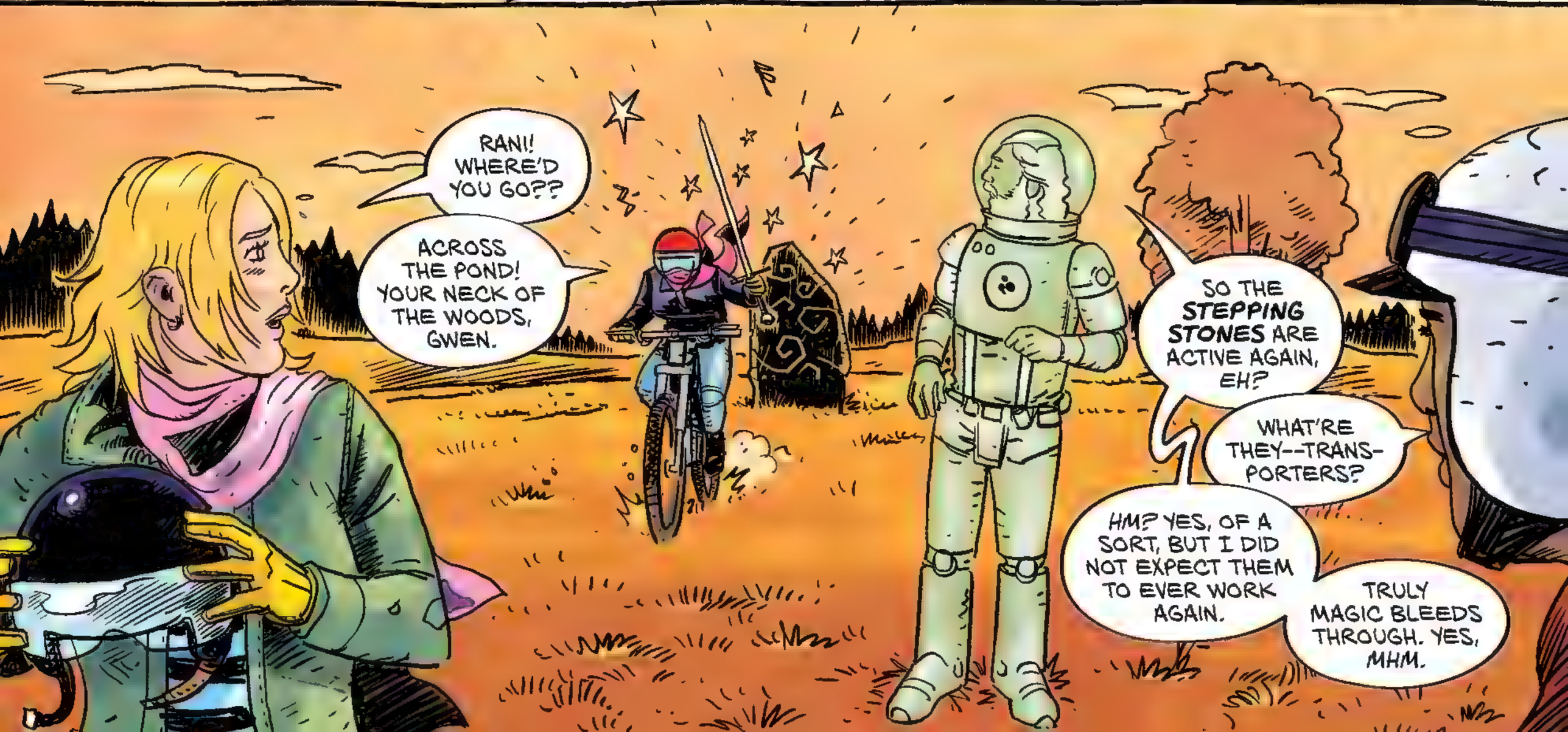

RANI?? BOLLOCKS!
WHERE'D SHE GO?!
FFP

CORNWALL, ENGLAND

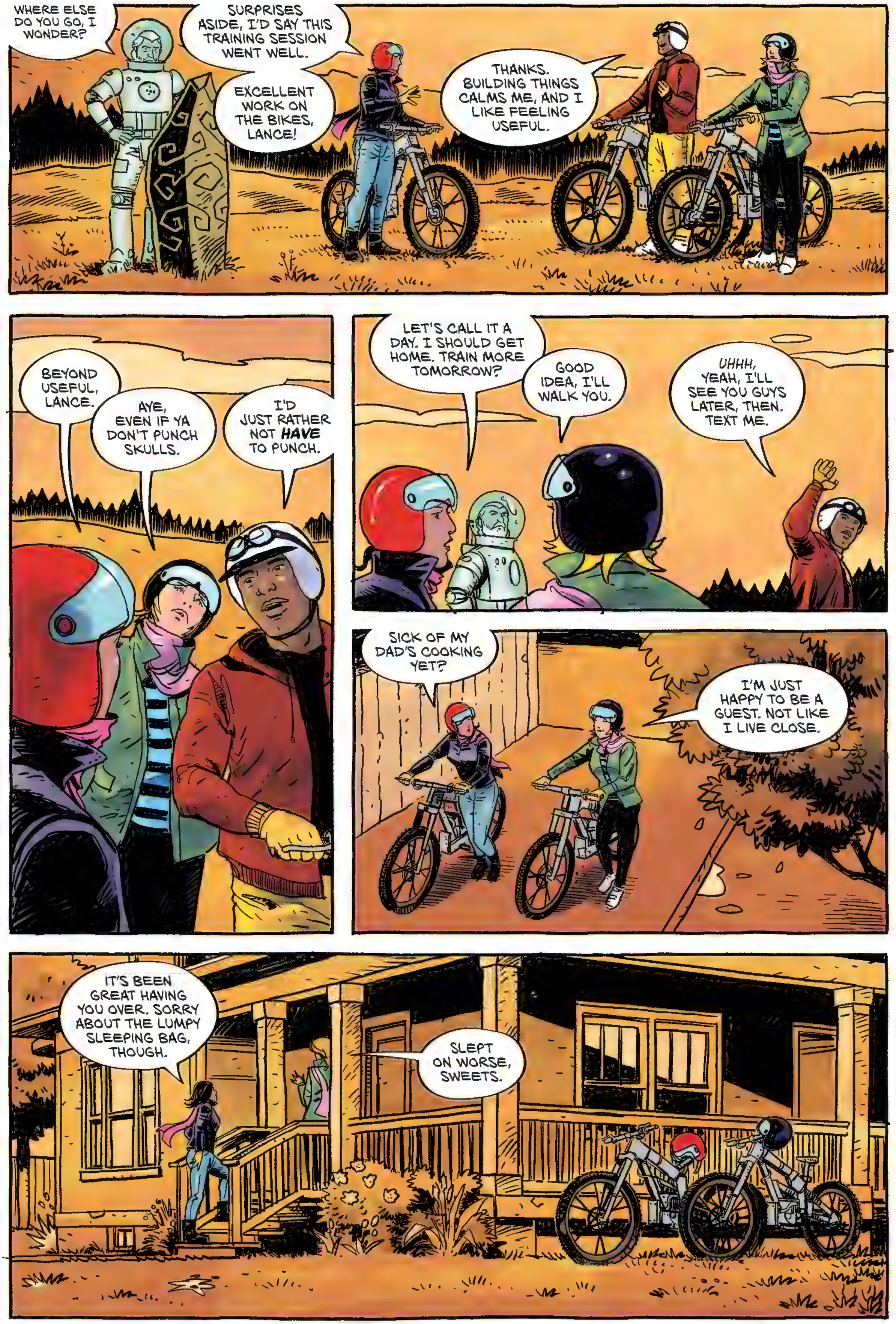




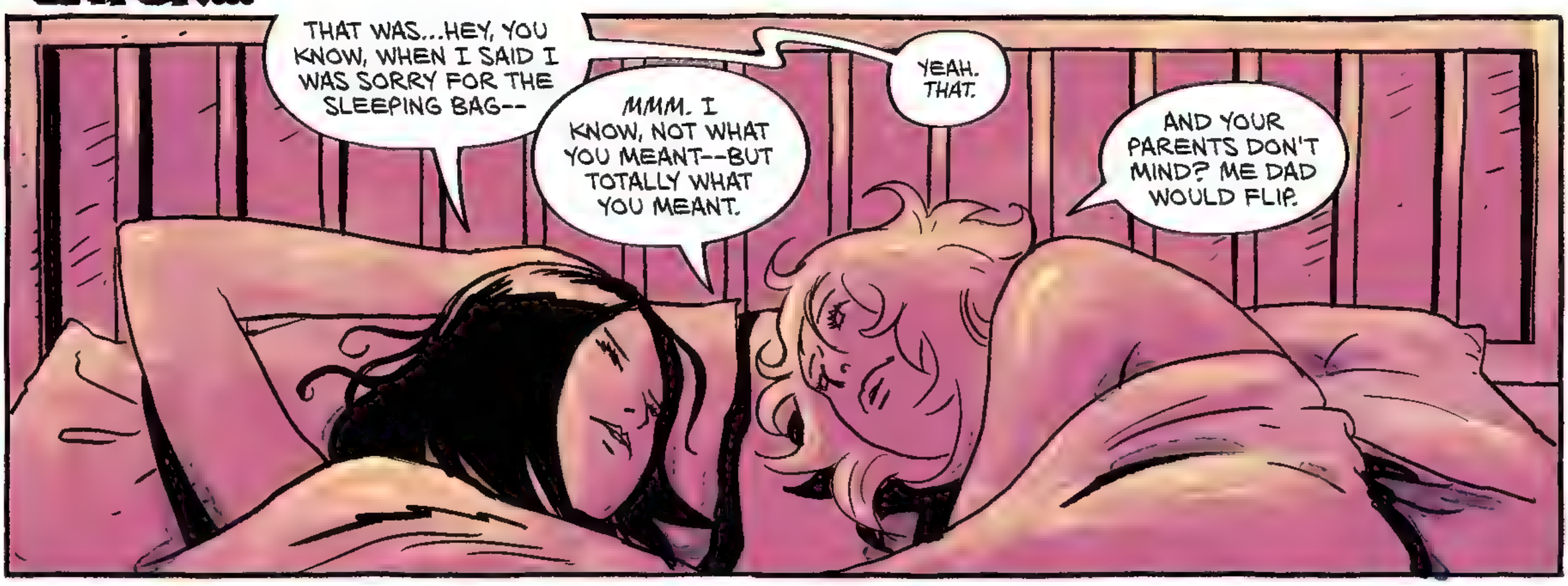


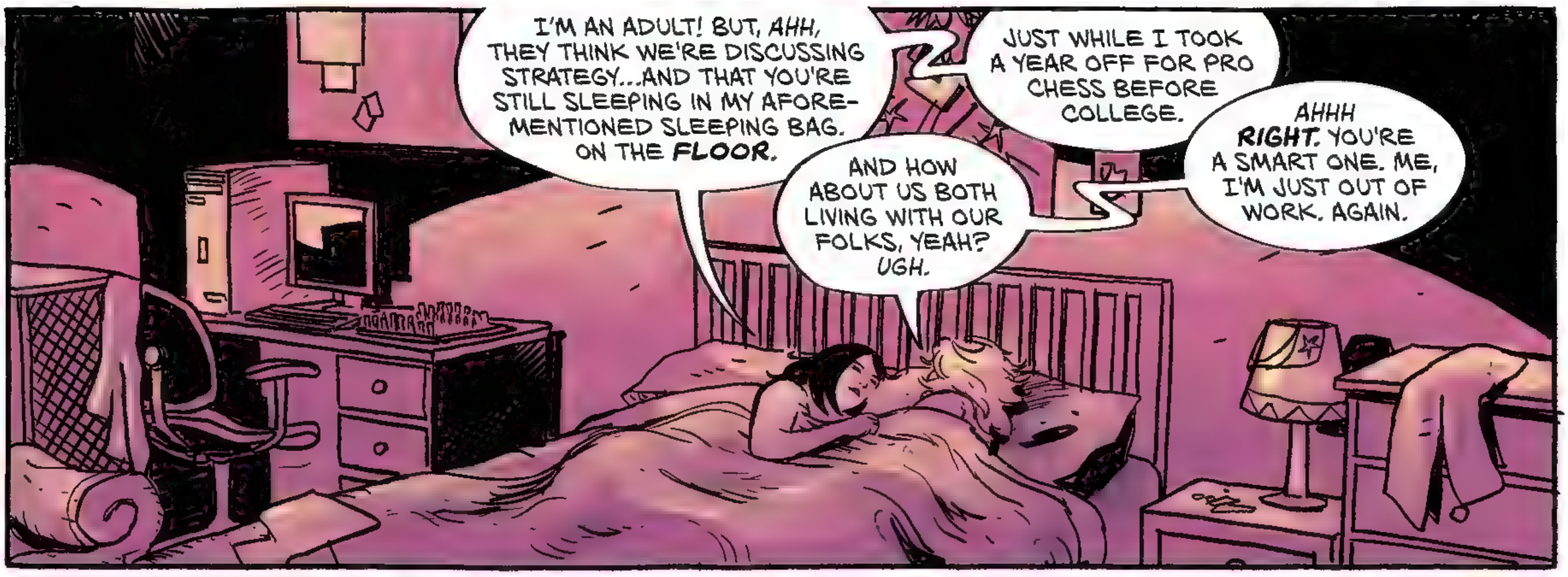


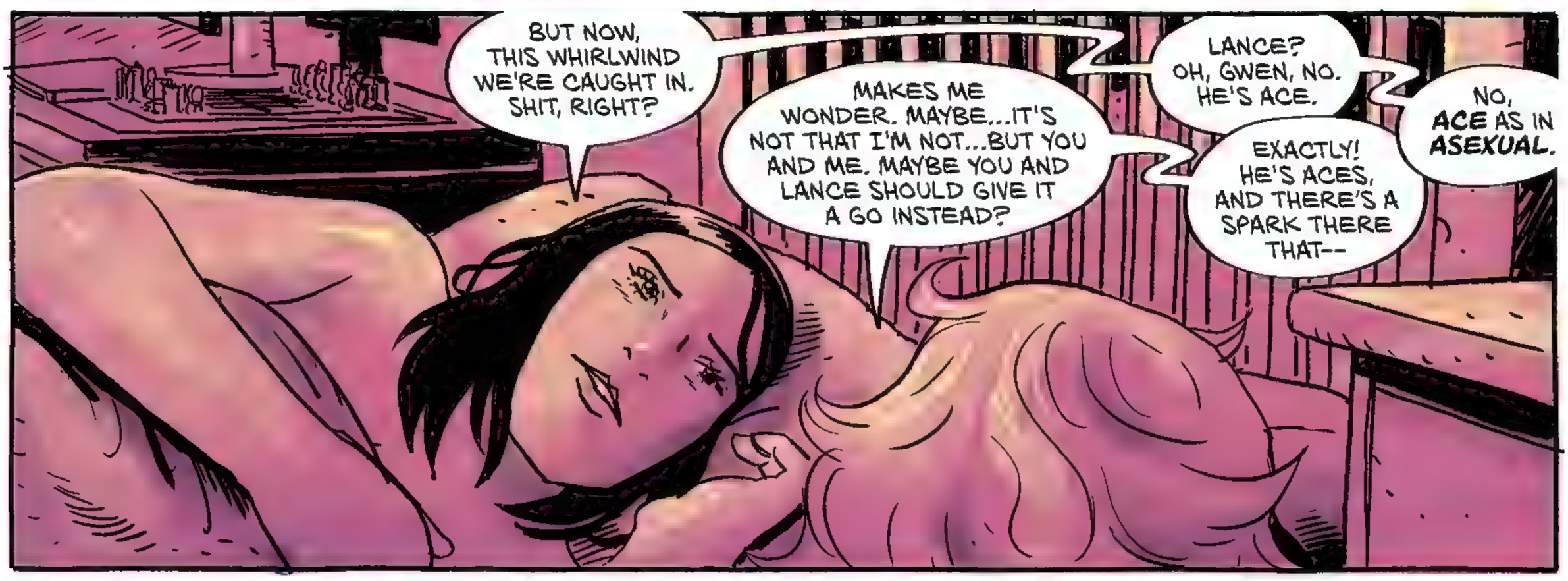
FAE
THE STONES-- SHE'S ACTIVATED THE STEPPING STONES!
ATTEND ME!
SIRE?
THE STONES ARE FUNCTIONAL AGAIN. THE HUMANS HAVE UNLOCKED THEM, AND IN DOING SO...
...THEY'VE GIVEN US LESS COSTLY PASSAGE FOR OUR INVASION.
BUT, SIRE...THE RISK...
THE STONES MAY NOT WORK AS THEY ONCE DID! WE COULD BE PULLED APART.
A RISK WE MUST TAKE.
OF--OF COURSE, SIRE.

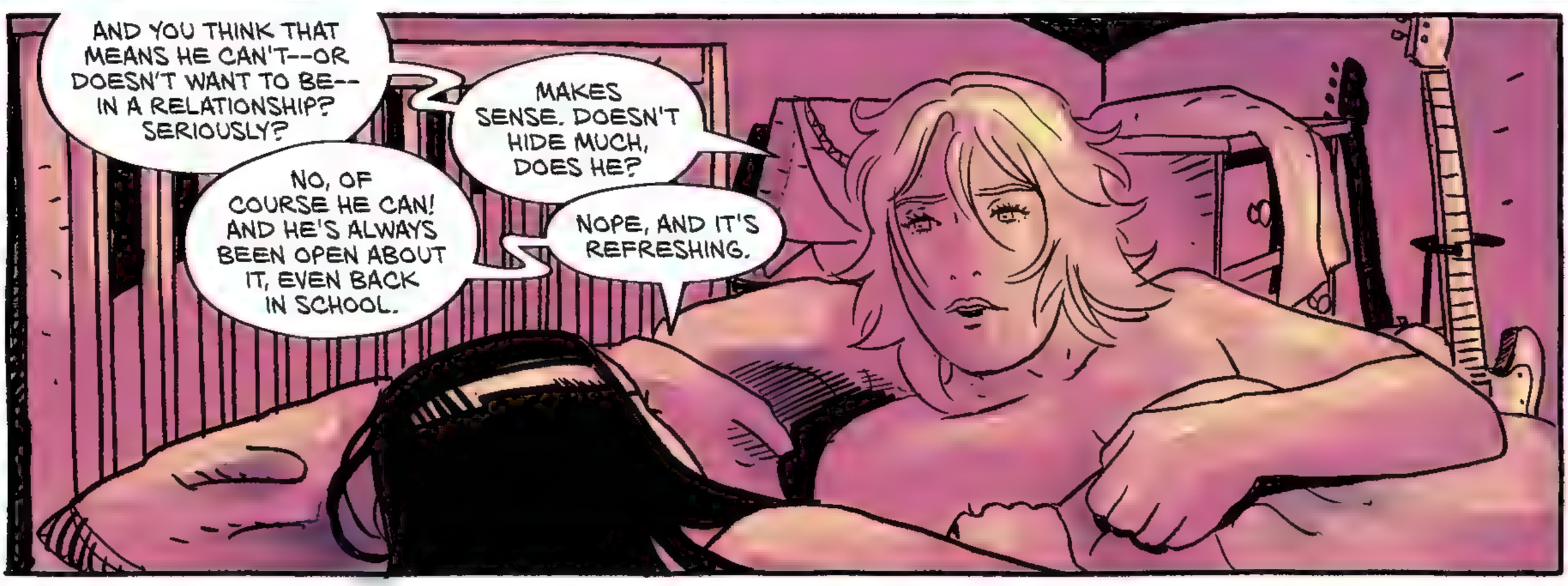

WHERE ELSE DO YOU GO, I WONDER?
SURPRISES ASIDE, I'D SAY THIS TRAINING SESSION WENT WELL.
EXCELLENT WORK ON THE BIKES, LANCE!
THANKS. BUILDING THINGS CALMS ME, AND I LIKE FEELING USEFUL.
BEYOND USEFUL, LANCE.
AYE, EVEN IF YA DON'T PUNCH SKULLS.
I'D JUST RATHER NOT HAVE TO PUNCH.
LET'S CALL IT A DAY. I SHOULD GET HOME. TRAIN MORE TOMORROW?
GOOD IDEA, I'LL WALK YOU.
UHHH, YEAH, I'LL SEE YOU GUYS LATER, THEN. TEXT ME.
SICK OF MY DAD'S COOKING YET?
I'M JUST HAPPY TO BE A GUEST. NOT LIKE I LIVE CLOSE.
IT'S BEEN GREAT HAVING YOU OVER. SORRY ABOUT THE LUMPY SLEEPING BAG, THOUGH.
SLEPT ON WORSE, SWEETS.

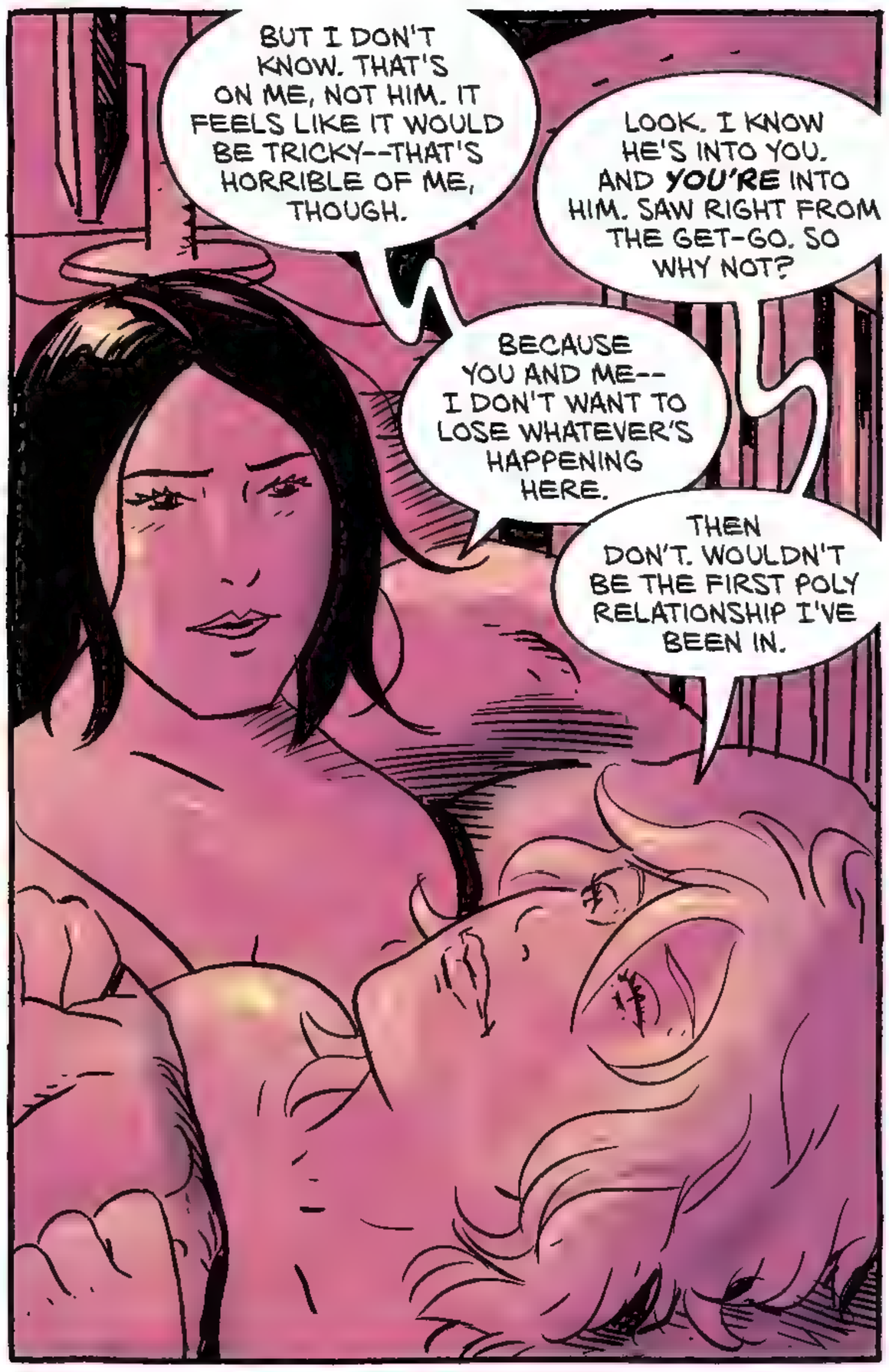
LATER...


THAT WAS...HEY, YOU KNOW, WHEN I SAID I WAS SORRY FOR THE SLEEPING BAG--
MMM. I KNOW, NOT WHAT YOU MEANT--BUT TOTALLY WHAT YOU MEANT.
YEAH. THAT.
AND YOUR PARENTS DON'T MIND? ME DAD WOULD FLIP.

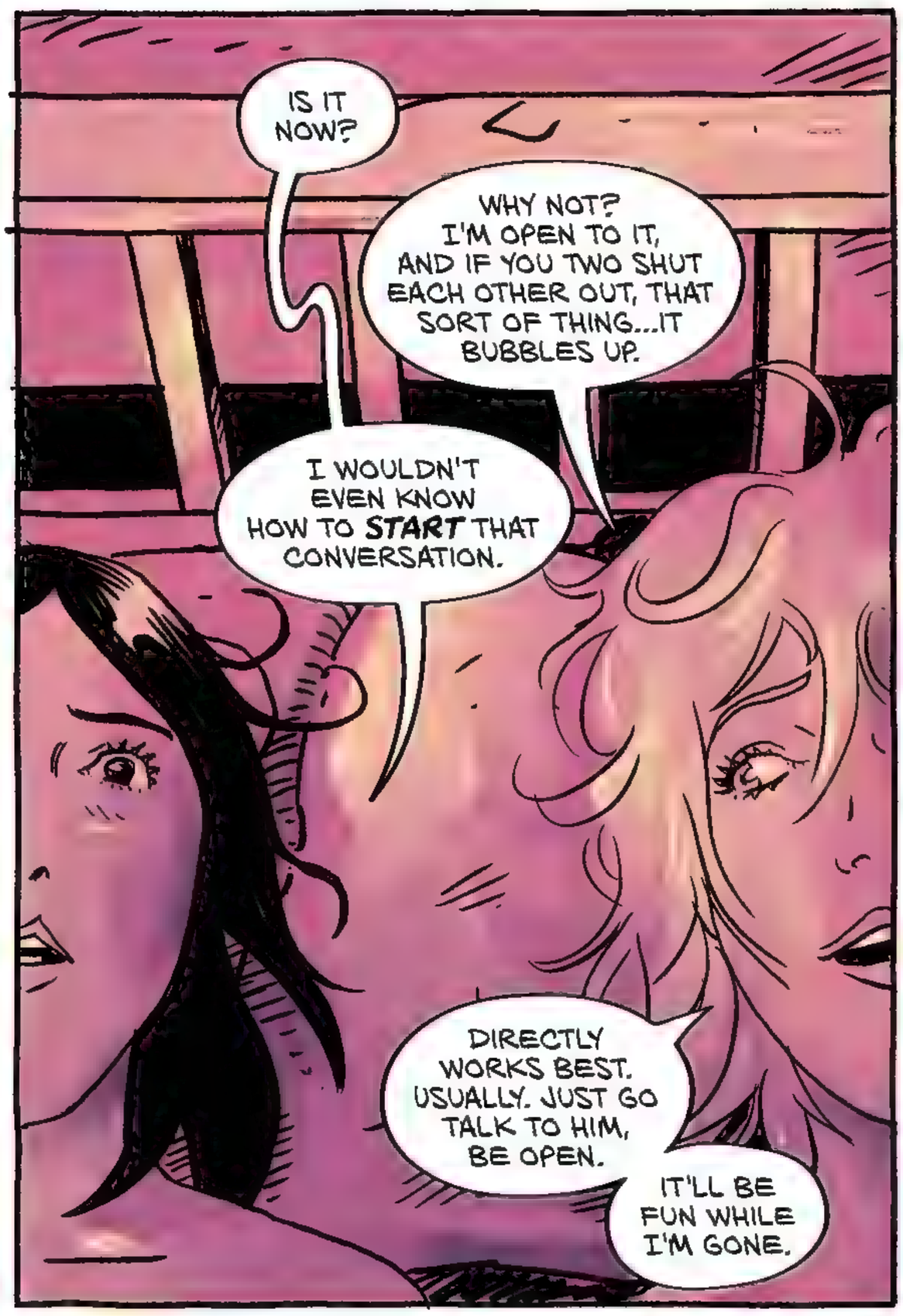

I'M AN ADULT! BUT, AHH, THEY THINK WE'RE DISCUSSING STRATEGY...AND THAT YOU'RE STILL SLEEPING IN MY AFORE-MENTIONED SLEEPING BAG. ON THE FLOOR.
JUST WHILE I TOOK A YEAR OFF FOR PRO CHESS BEFORE COLLEGE.
AND HOW ABOUT US BOTH LIVING WITH OUR FOLKS, YEAH? UGH.
AHHH RIGHT. YOU'RE A SMART ONE. ME, I'M JUST OUT OF WORK. AGAIN.


BUT NOW, THIS WHIRLWIND WE'RE CAUGHT IN. SHIT, RIGHT?
MAKES ME WONDER. MAYBE...IT'S NOT THAT I'M NOT...BUT YOU AND ME. MAYBE YOU AND LANCE SHOULD GIVE IT A GO INSTEAD?
LANCE? OH, GWEN, NO. HE'S ACE.
NO, ACE AS IN ASEXUAL.
EXACTLY! HE'S ACES, AND THERE'S A SPARK THERE THAT--


AND YOU THINK THAT MEANS HE CAN'T--OR DOESN'T WANT TO BE--IN A RELATIONSHIP? SERIOUSLY?
MAKES SENSE. DOESN'T HIDE MUCH, DOES HE?
NO, OF COURSE HE CAN! AND HE'S ALWAYS BEEN OPEN ABOUT IT, EVEN BACK IN SCHOOL.
NOPE, AND IT'S REFRESHING.


BUT I DON'T KNOW. THAT'S ON ME, NOT HIM. IT FEELS LIKE IT WOULD BE TRICKY--THAT'S HORRIBLE OF ME, THOUGH.
LOOK. I KNOW HE'S INTO YOU. AND YOU'RE INTO HIM. SAW RIGHT FROM THE GET-GO. SO WHY NOT?
BECAUSE YOU AND ME-- I DON'T WANT TO LOSE WHATEVER'S HAPPENING HERE.
THEN DON'T. WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST POLY RELATIONSHIP I'VE BEEN IN.

IT WOULD BE FOR ME.
ANY INTEREST?
I DON'T KNOW. I'VE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT.
THEN IT'S WORTH A TRY-- OR A THINK AT LEAST.


IS IT NOW?
WHY NOT? I'M OPEN TO IT, AND IF YOU TWO SHUT EACH OTHER OUT, THAT SORT OF THING...IT BUBBLES UP.
I WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO START THAT CONVERSATION.
DIRECTLY WORKS BEST. USUALLY. JUST GO TALK TO HIM, BE OPEN.
IT'LL BE FUN WHILE I'M GONE.

GONE? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
ME DAD'S GOTTA BE OFF HIS GOURD, AND YOU JUST FOUND ME A WAY TO VISIT WITHOUT NEEDING TO BUY A PLANE TICKET!

FAE, THE BORDER LANDS

SO YOU SEE, ME LORD, THE PORTAL IS OPEN--BUT ONLY ***HERE.***

IT MAY ALSO CAUSE, *HRRM...* ***INVERSIONS.***

INVERSIONS, PEEJKI? EXPLAIN.

IF I MAY... THE FAE GONE THROUGH MAY FIND THEIR INSIDES... ***OUTSIDE.***

THEN YOU, LUMIT, AND YOU, ARDEEN, SHALL LEAD THE CHARGE!

MORGANA'S INFORMATION NEEDS TO BE ACTED UPON PROMPTLY.

BUT... SIRE...

AM I NOT THE KING IN SHADOW? AM I NOT IN CONTROL OF THE SKIES AND THE BLOOD AND THE BONE? ***I SO DECREE!***

AYE, MY KING. WE SHALL GATHER FORCES, PERHAPS EVEN TROLLS, AND RETURN ***VICTORIOUS.***

SEE THAT YOU DO.

AND IF WE DIE IN THE ATTEMPT? OVER WHAT? HOOMAN STINK?

THEN WE DIE, WHICH WILL BE LESS PAINFUL THAN RETURNING HERE AS FAILURES YET AGAIN.

MOUNT HOOD, OREGON, USA

WELL, HERE GOES THEN.

KICK

BEAM ME UP, SCOTTY!

FFP

PORTLAND, OREGON, USA

A-BOY ELECTRIC and PLUMBING CO

40th Ave N.

Broadway E. 42nd Ave

OH HEY! THAT'S WHY MORGAN PARI'S IN TOWN. COOL.

MORGAN PARI signing @ BOOKS! BOOKS!

HARVEST

HOPE

LIVE MUSIC

TROUSER TRIBULATION

HERE GOES EVERYTHING...

CORNWALL, ENGLAND

DAD? DAD!

AHHH, THERE SHE IS. FINALLY COME DOWNSTAIRS, THEN?

DOWNST--? I'VE BEEN GONE FOR DAYS!

IF YE SAY SO, WEE ONE. GOOD TIMING THOUGH, S'LONG AS YOU HAVE MONEY TO GO DOWN TO THE SHOPS.

=SIGH= YEAH, I'LL GO GET YOU YOUR PISS.

WHY I BOTHER WITH THAT MAN, COMING HOME, ANY OF IT, I'LL NEVER KNOW.

GRRRR

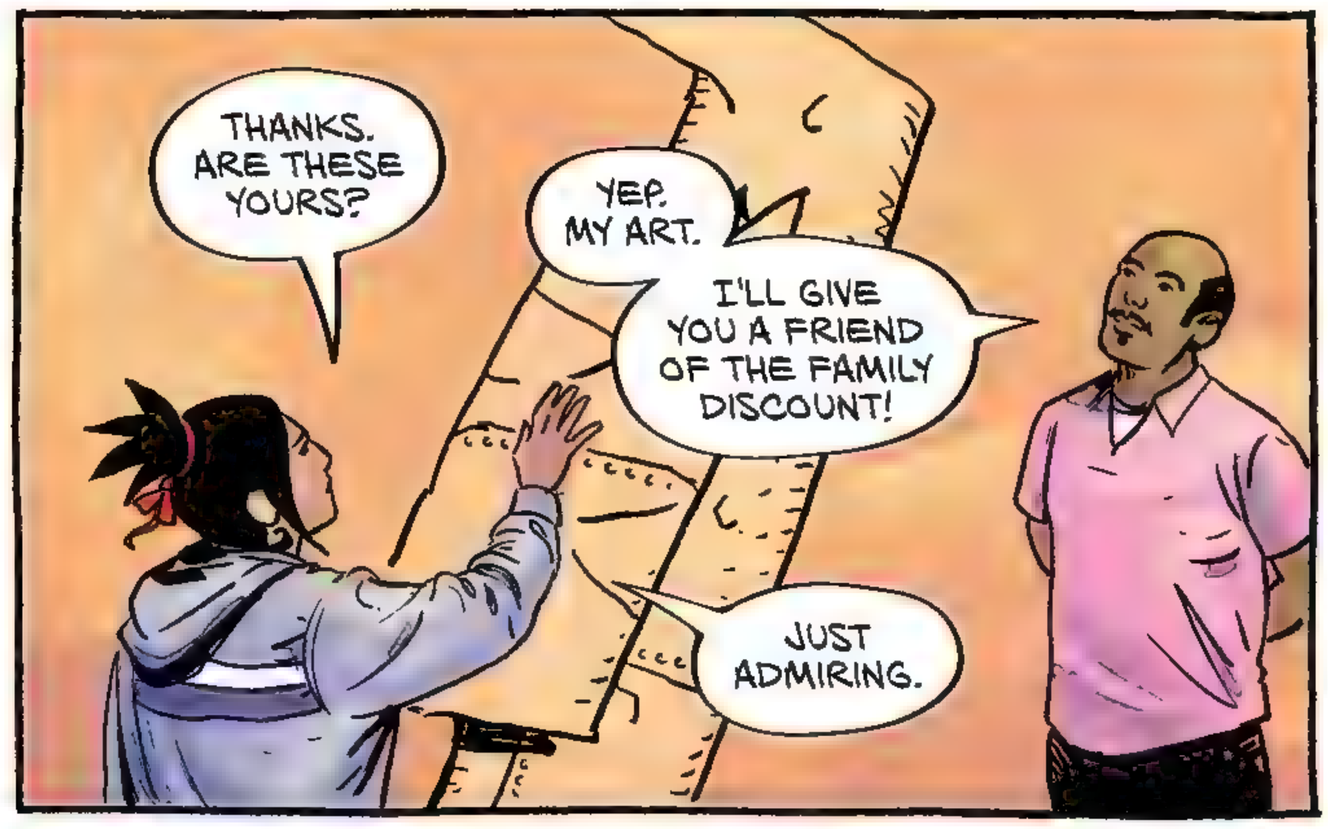
HOOMANS...

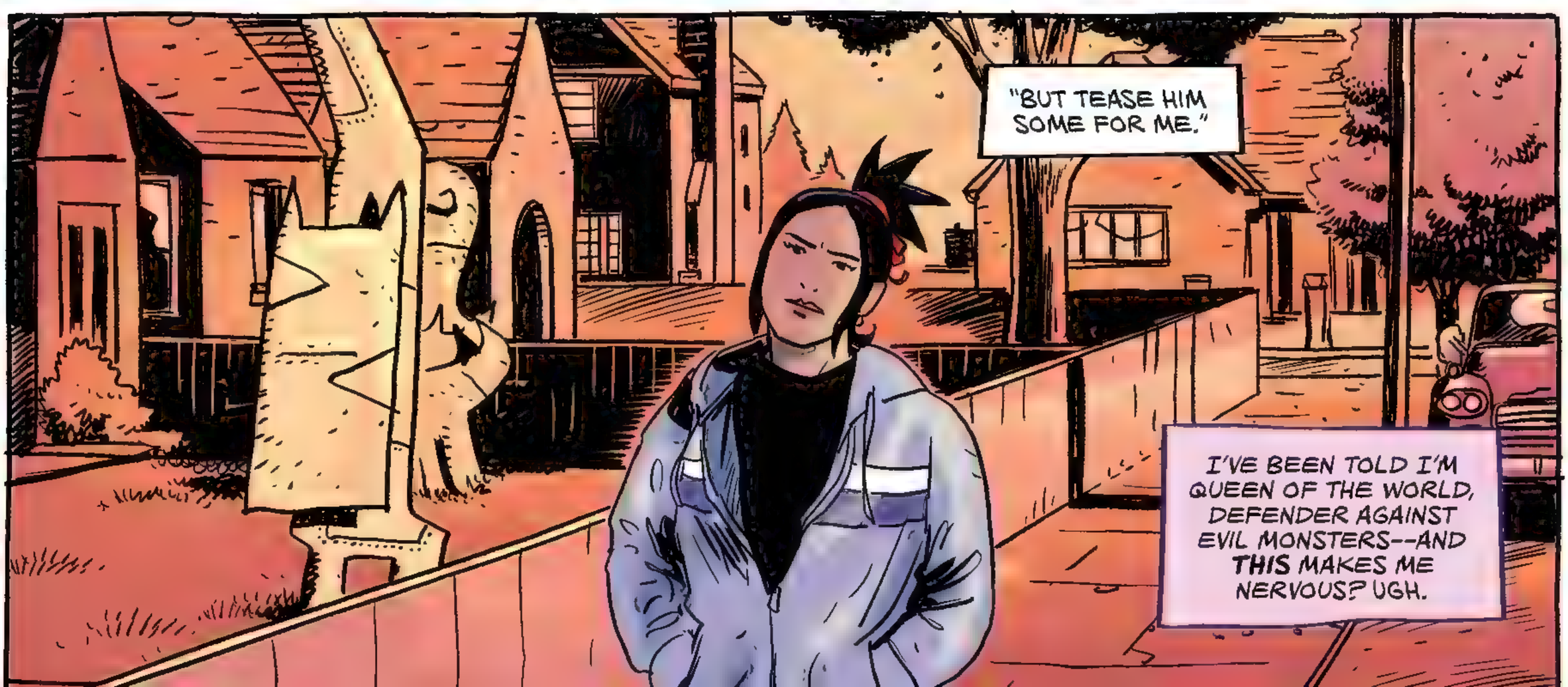
LUNCH!

YOU **BASTARDS** ON THIS SIDE OF THE POND, TOO?

GOOD, I NEEDED SOMEONE TO PUNCH IN THE BRAIN!

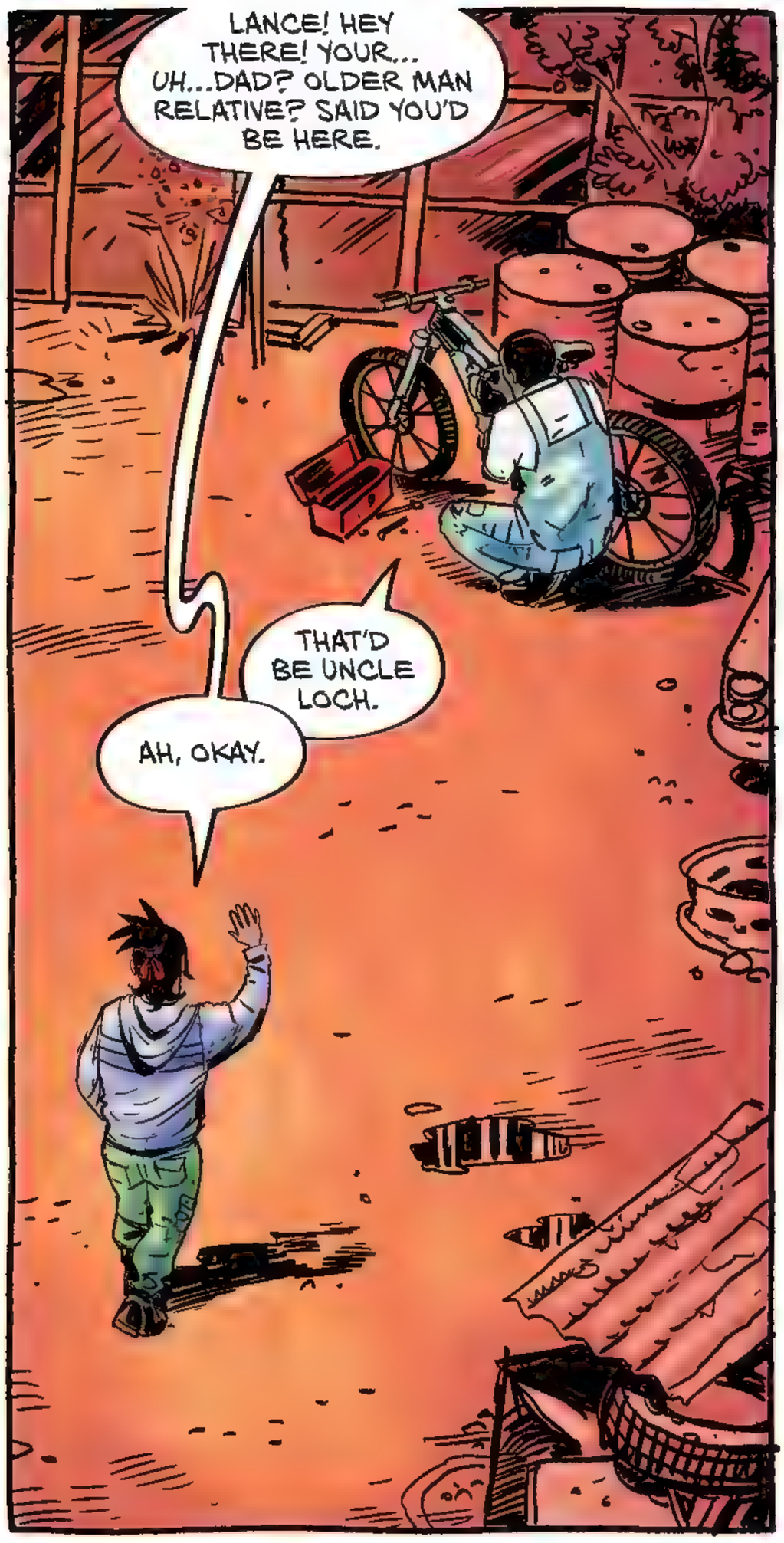
I'LL CALL YOU TOMORROW, SANDRA.
YOU BETTER THIS TIME, OLD MAN.
I'M ONLY A MONTH OLDER THAN YOU!

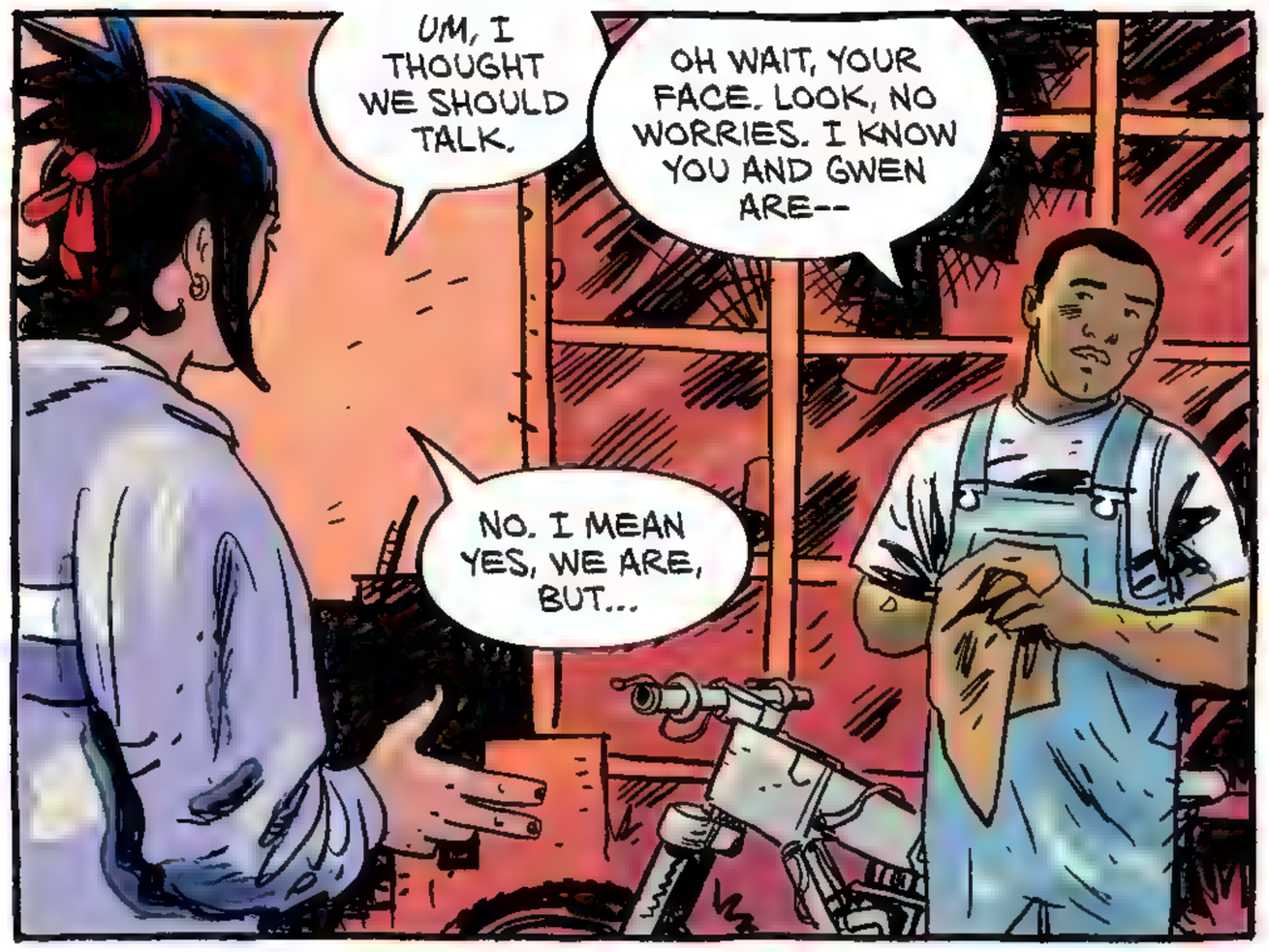




COME ON, THEN!
GWEN? WHAT ARE YE...?
HOLY BUGGERY!
HOLD ON!
SLAM
BLAM
HEP! STAY WHERE YE ARE!
I LIKE IT WHEN THE HOOMANS FIGHT BACK. LET US FEAST ON THEIR BONES!
HEH!
HSSSSS

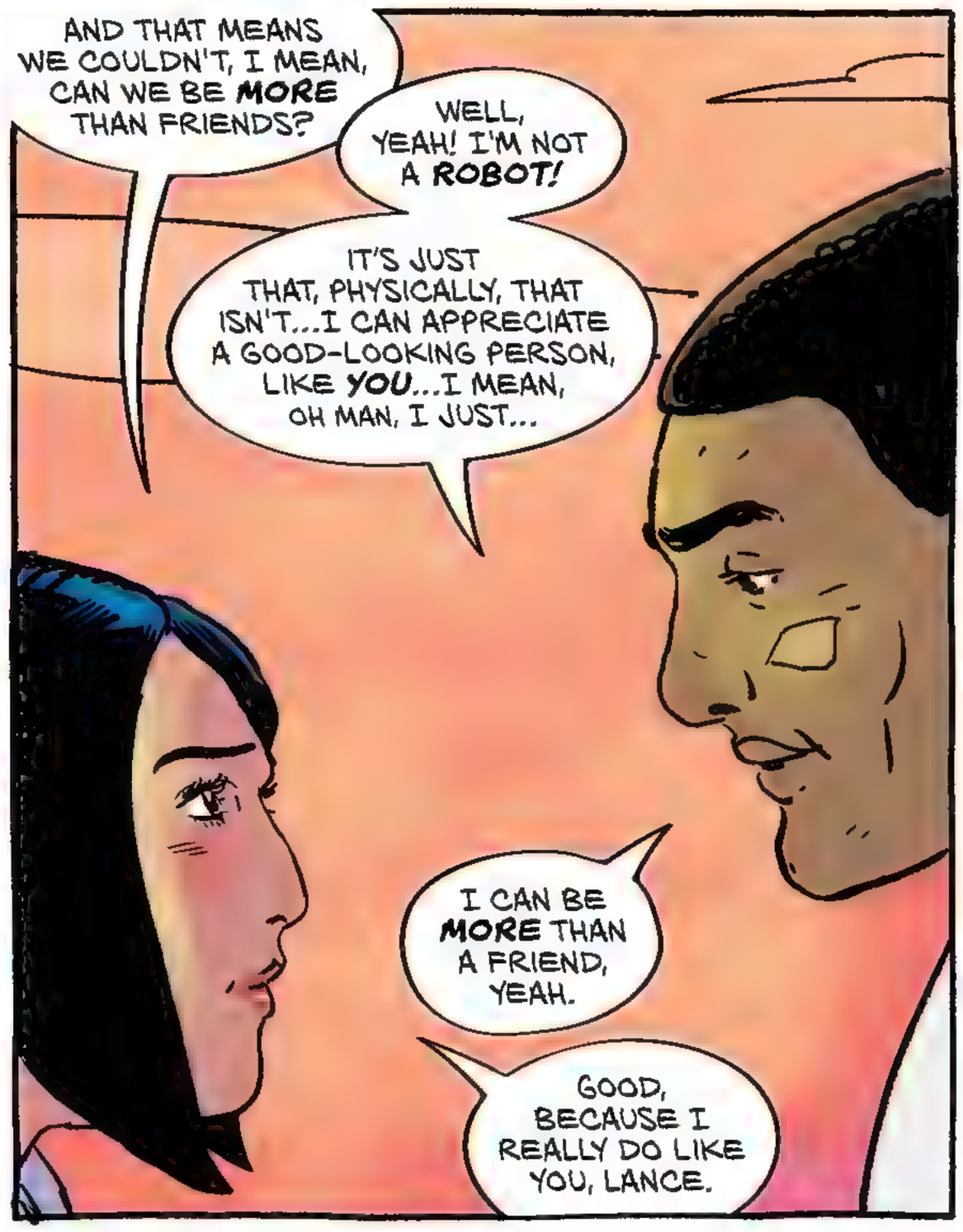
ALL RIGHT, BIG'UN!
!
HEERAGH!
GWEN, HOW...?
BLAM
GWEN, WHAT ARE THEY?
JUST SO.
DEAD, SOON ENOUGH, DAD.


LANCE! HEY THERE! YOUR... UH...DAD? OLDER MAN RELATIVE? SAID YOU'D BE HERE.
THAT'D BE UNCLE LOCH.
AH, OKAY.


UM, I THOUGHT WE SHOULD TALK.
OH WAIT, YOUR FACE. LOOK, NO WORRIES. I KNOW YOU AND GWEN ARE--
NO. I MEAN YES, WE ARE, BUT...

...WE LIKE EACH OTHER, TOO, RIGHT? DON'T TELL ME I'M IMAGINING THINGS.
LET'S JUST CUT TO IT. GWEN THOUGHT WE SHOULD DISCUSS WHATEVER THIS IS AND--
AND LET ME DOWN EASY? NO NEED. IT'S FINE.

NO, I MEAN SHE THOUGHT MAYBE YOU AND ME SHOULD... YOU KNOW...
SHE...? OH. OH! I MEAN, YEAH, I LIKE YOU, BUT YOU KNOW I'M--
ACE.
RIGHT.


AND THAT MEANS WE COULDN'T, I MEAN, CAN WE BE MORE THAN FRIENDS?
WELL, YEAH! I'M NOT A ROBOT!
IT'S JUST THAT, PHYSICALLY, THAT ISN'T...I CAN APPRECIATE A GOOD-LOOKING PERSON, LIKE YOU...I MEAN, OH MAN, I JUST...
I CAN BE MORE THAN A FRIEND, YEAH.
GOOD, BECAUSE I REALLY DO LIKE YOU, LANCE.

LIKE FIREWOOD!
URK!

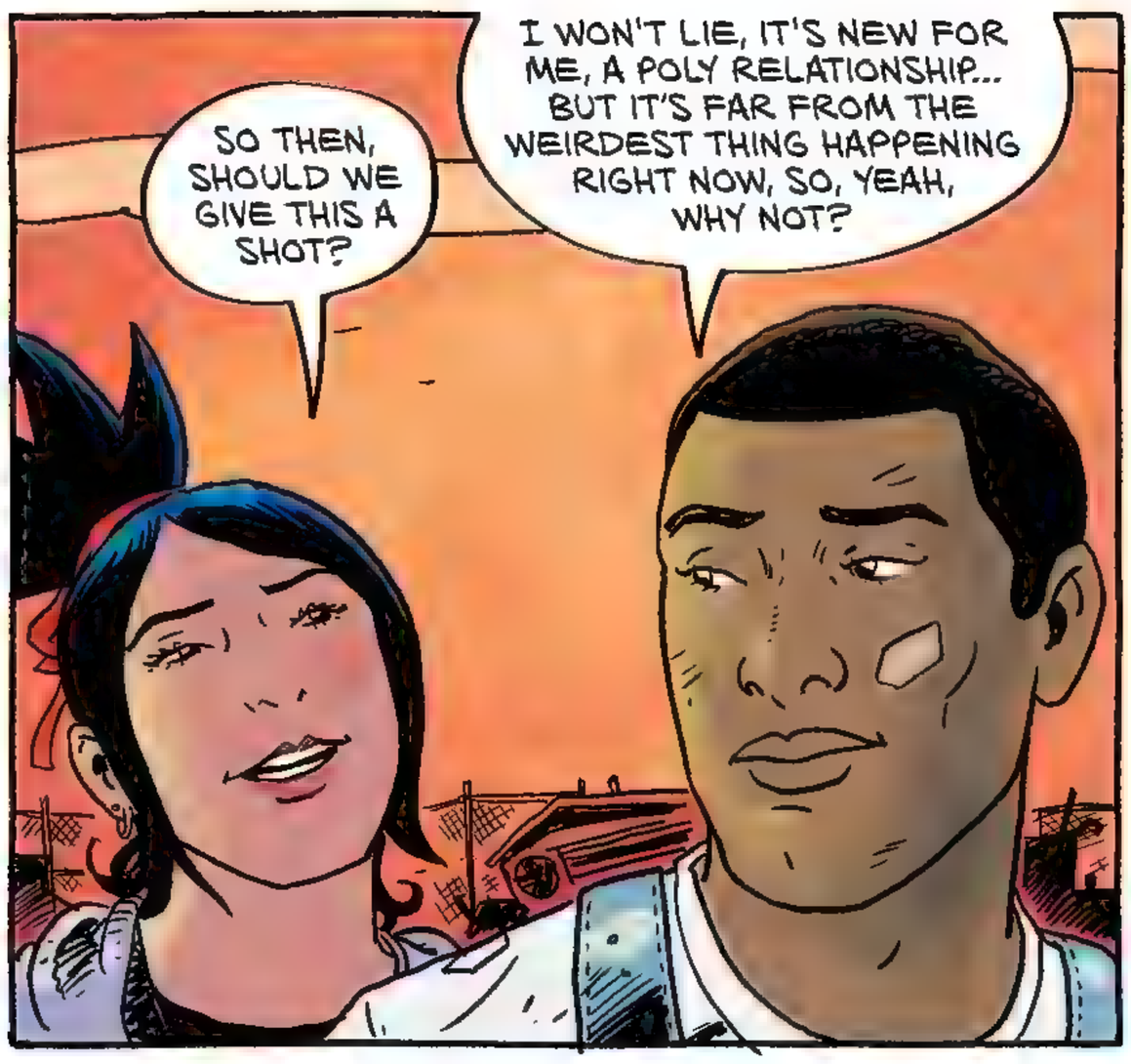
IF THIS IS THE D.T.'S, GWEN, I SWEAR TA--
IT'S REAL-- KEEP AT 'EM!

HA!
WHOOSH

DAD!
POW

TAP TAP
C'MON...

NO!
C'MON, RING!
RING!


SO THEN, SHOULD WE GIVE THIS A SHOT?
I WON'T LIE, IT'S NEW FOR ME, A POLY RELATIONSHIP... BUT IT'S FAR FROM THE WEIRDEST THING HAPPENING RIGHT NOW, SO, YEAH, WHY NOT?

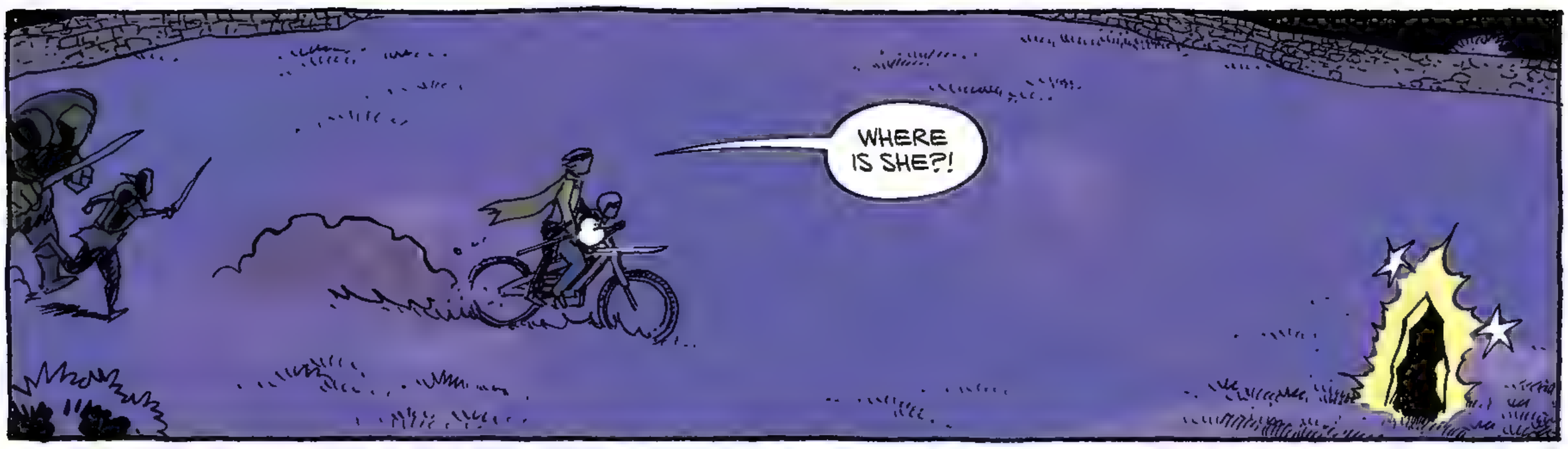
ONE RULE, AND GWEN AGREED AS WELL--WE HAVE TO BE OPEN WITH EACH OTHER. HONEST. EVEN IF IT'S UGLY.
WE'RE ALL ARMED THESE DAYS, SO THAT'S WISE.

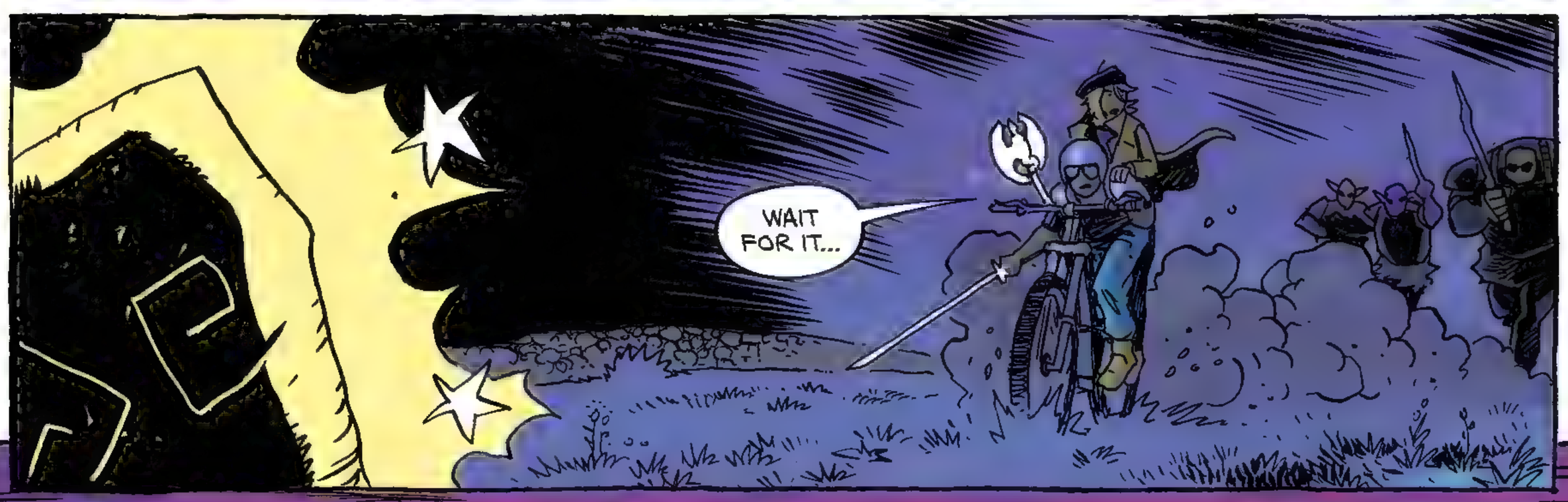
EXACTLY. I MEAN, I DON'T...I'M HAPPY, THOUGH! THIS IS--
BZZT BZZT
HOLD ON. SORRY.

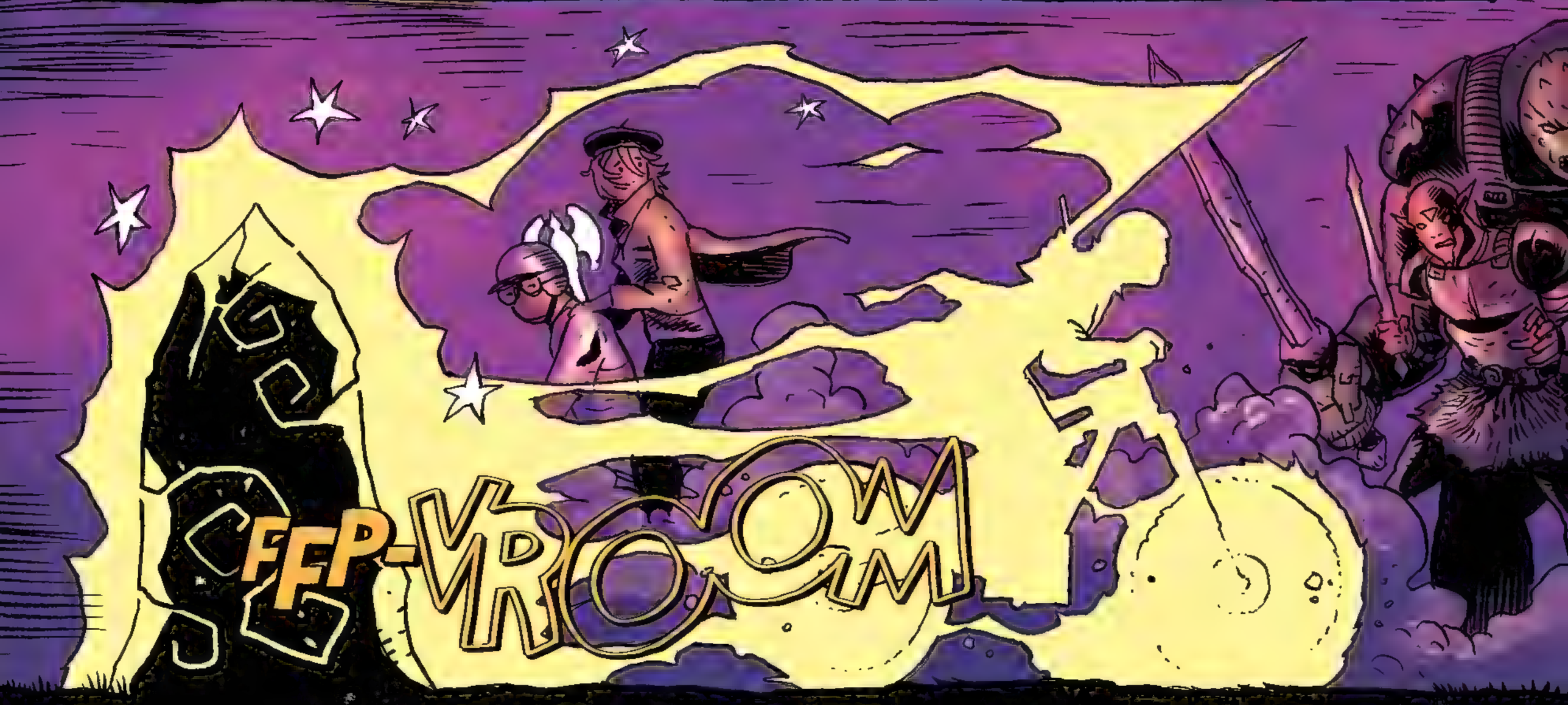
HI, GWEN. WHO'S--WHAT'S THAT NOISE? GWEN? ARE YOU OKAY? IS THAT--HELLO?
WHAT'S UP?

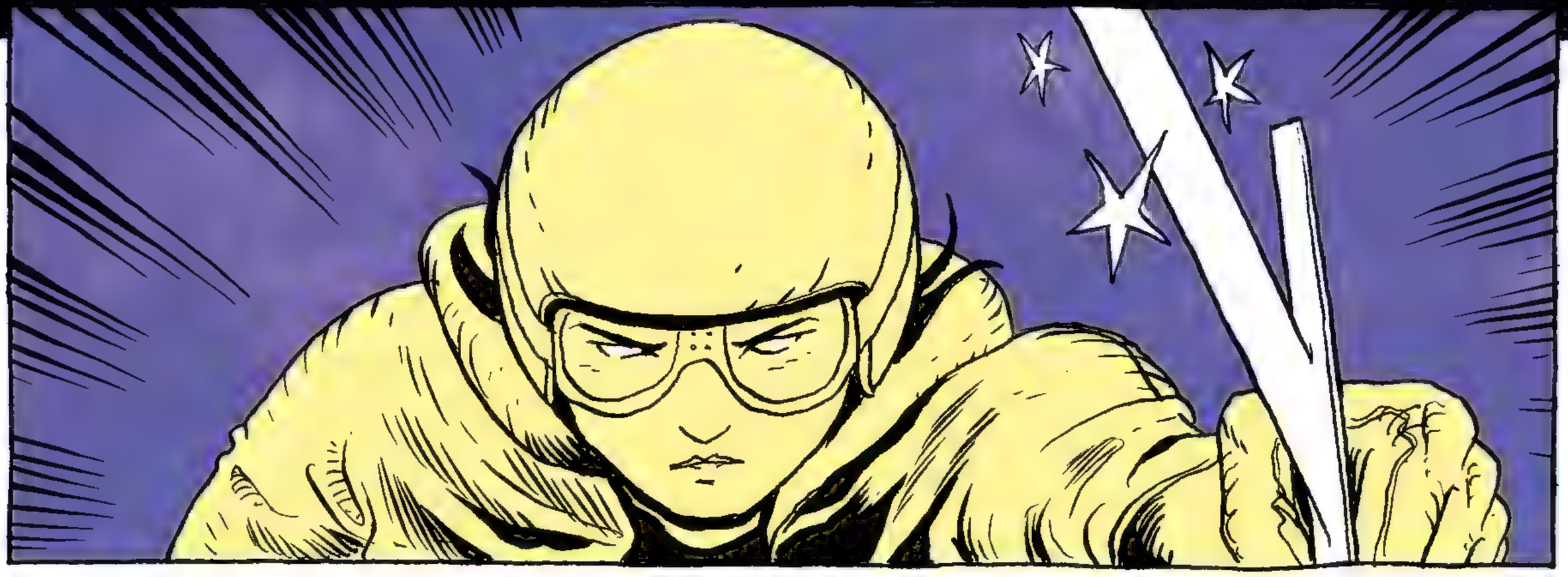
GWEN'S BACK HOME. SOUNDS LIKE SHE'S UNDER ATTACK, I DON'T KNOW, BUT WE HAVE TO--
WE'LL GRAB YOUR BIKE ON THE WAY. LET'S GO!

YOU BEASTS LEAVE MY DA ALONE!
OOOHHH...
INCOMING!
YEERAGH!
WE HAVE TO GET TO THE STEPPING STONE! DRAW THEM AWAY FROM BYSTANDERS!
AMBULANCE IS ON THE WAY FOR MY DAD, BUT RANI HAS A PLAN, YES? PLEASE?
IT'S WHAT SHE DOES.
IF THEY DON'T ALL FOLLOW, I NEED TO GO BACK, UNDERSTAND?

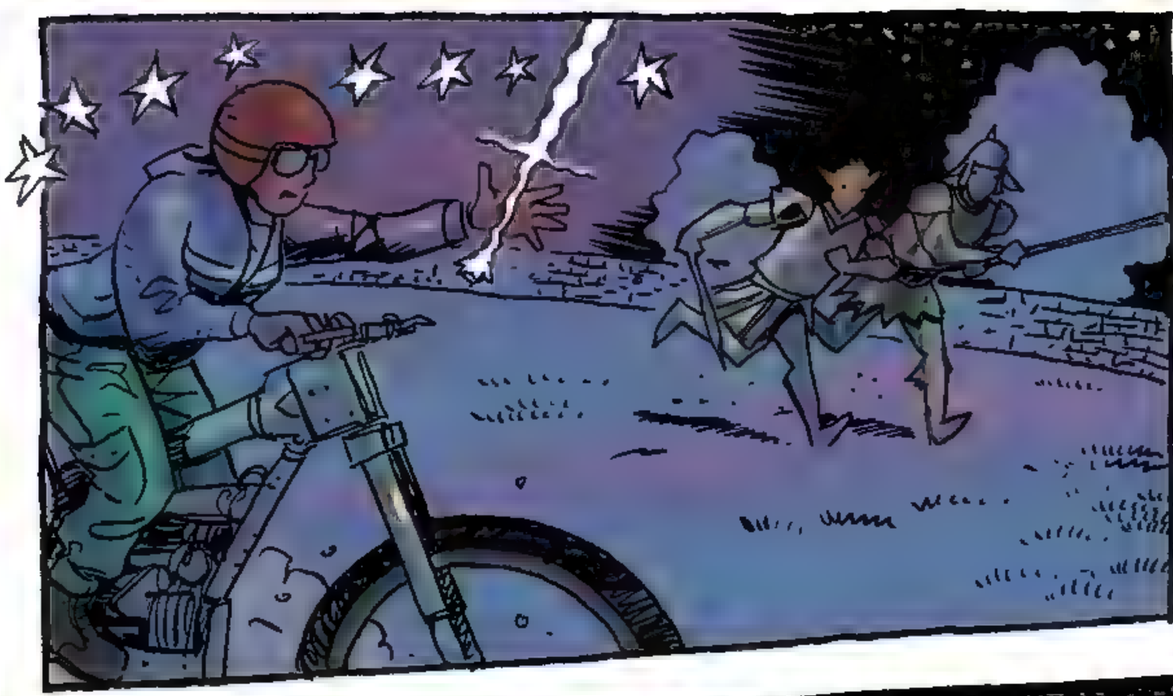

WHERE IS SHE?!


WAIT FOR IT...

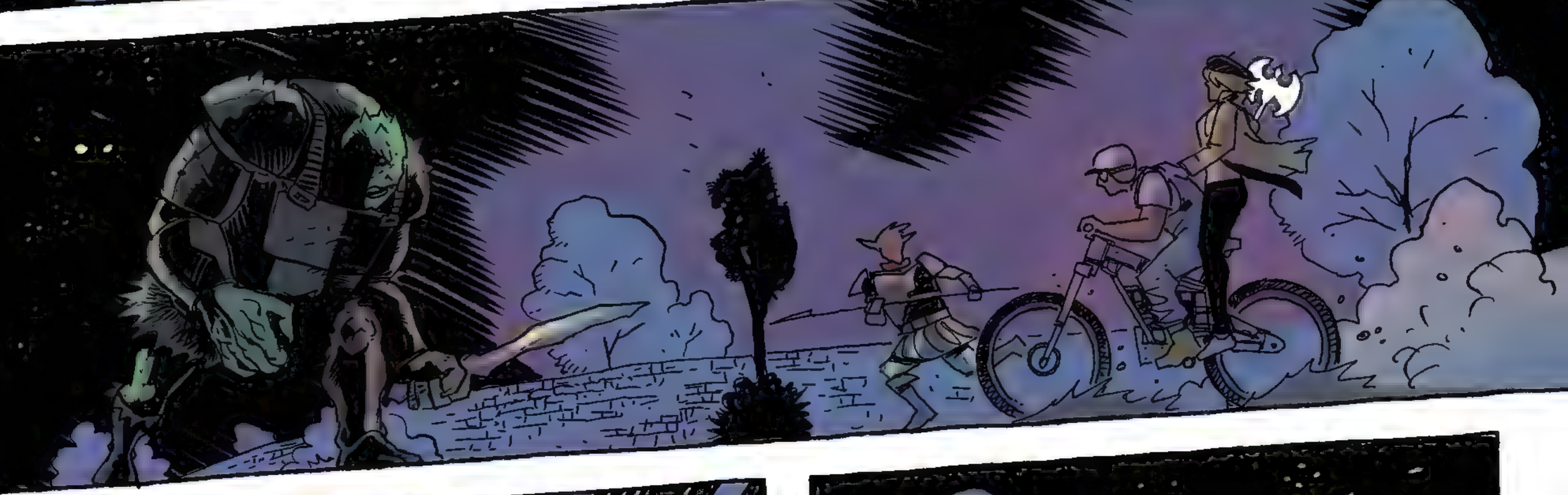

FFP-VROOM



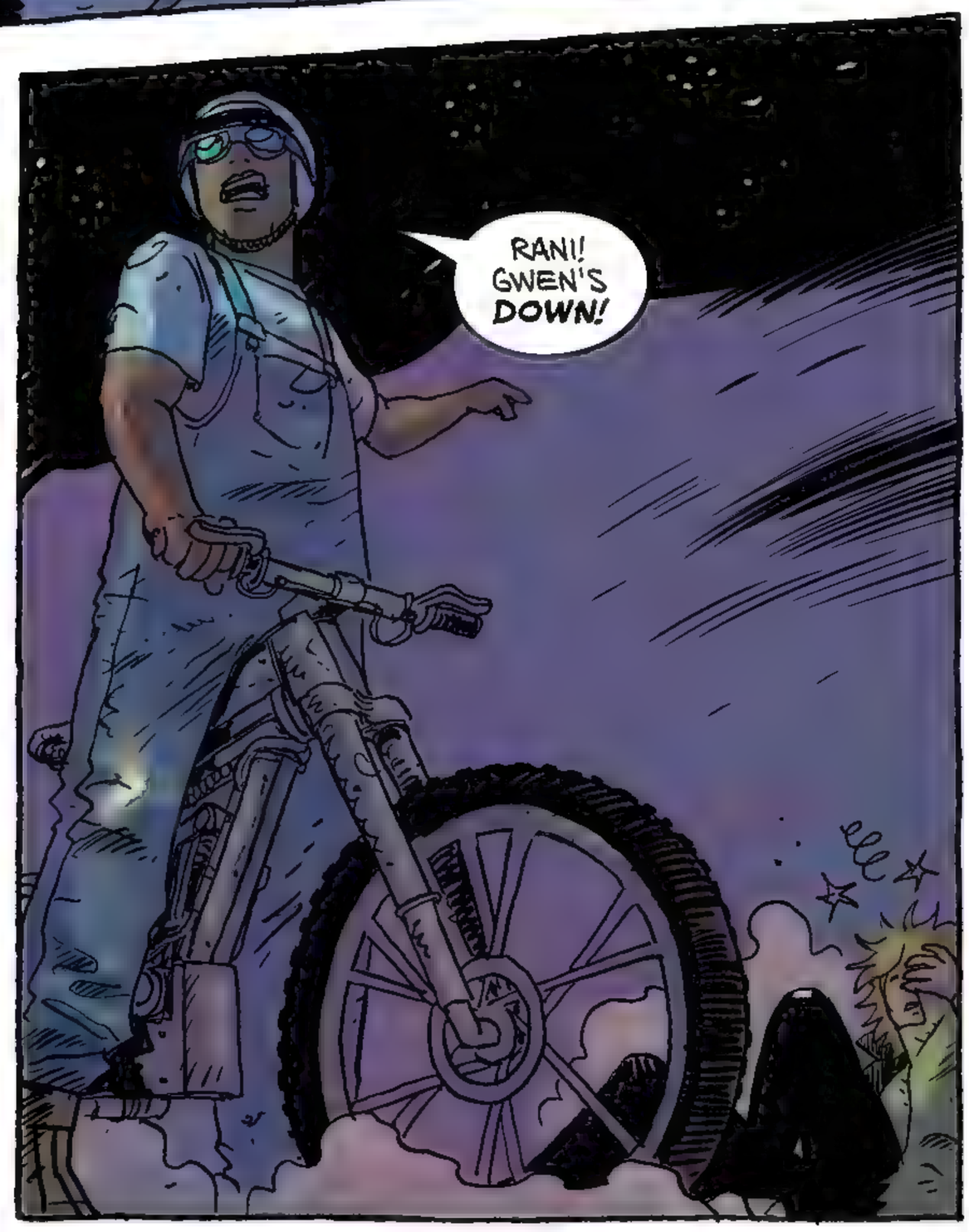
POK
AFF!
HEEE--
--YAAAAAH!
SO THE FALSE QUEEN HAS A STEED? NO MATTER!
HOW'S YOUR DEPTH PERCEPTION?
AK--?
THUNK
HA, GOOD ENOUGH, HOOMAN!



YOU'RE MINE.

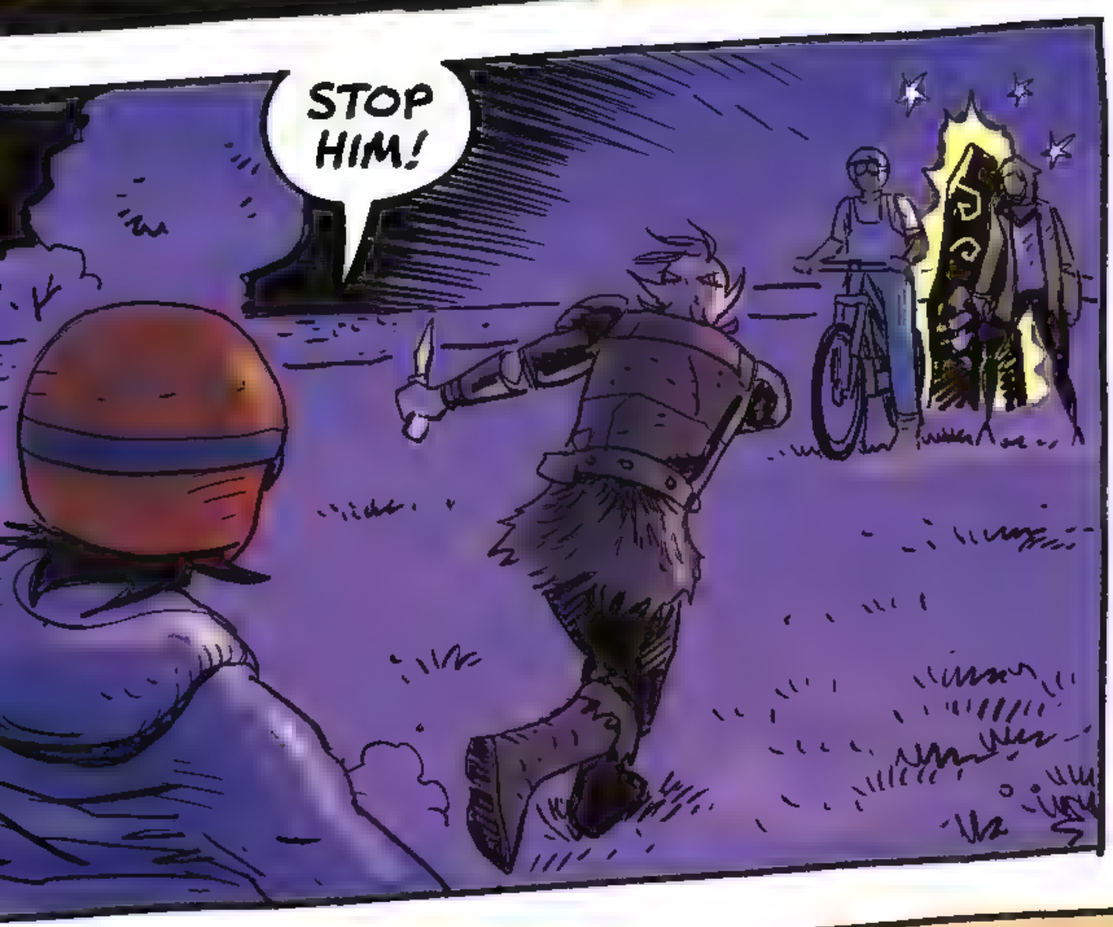


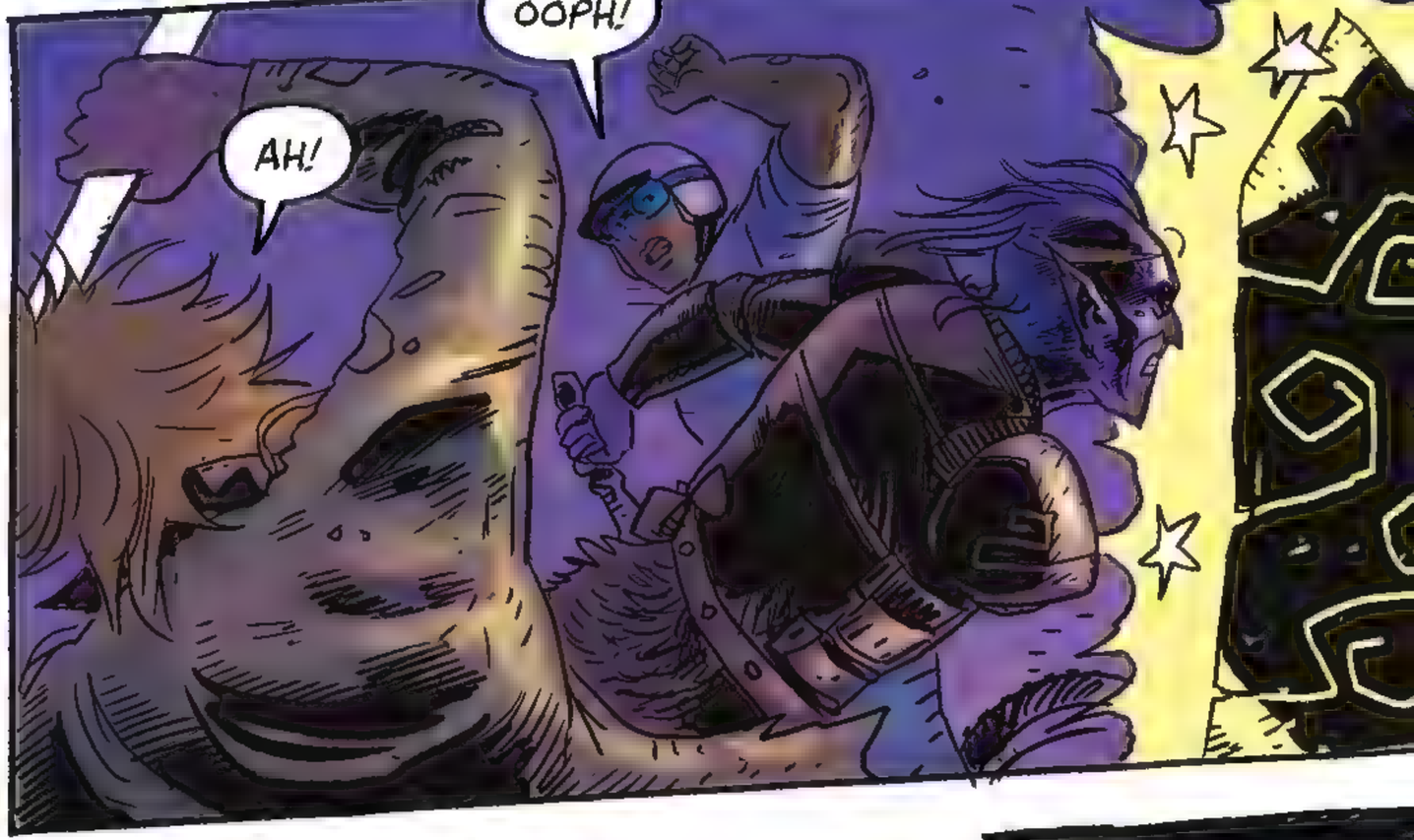
UT!
CRAK
GWEN!

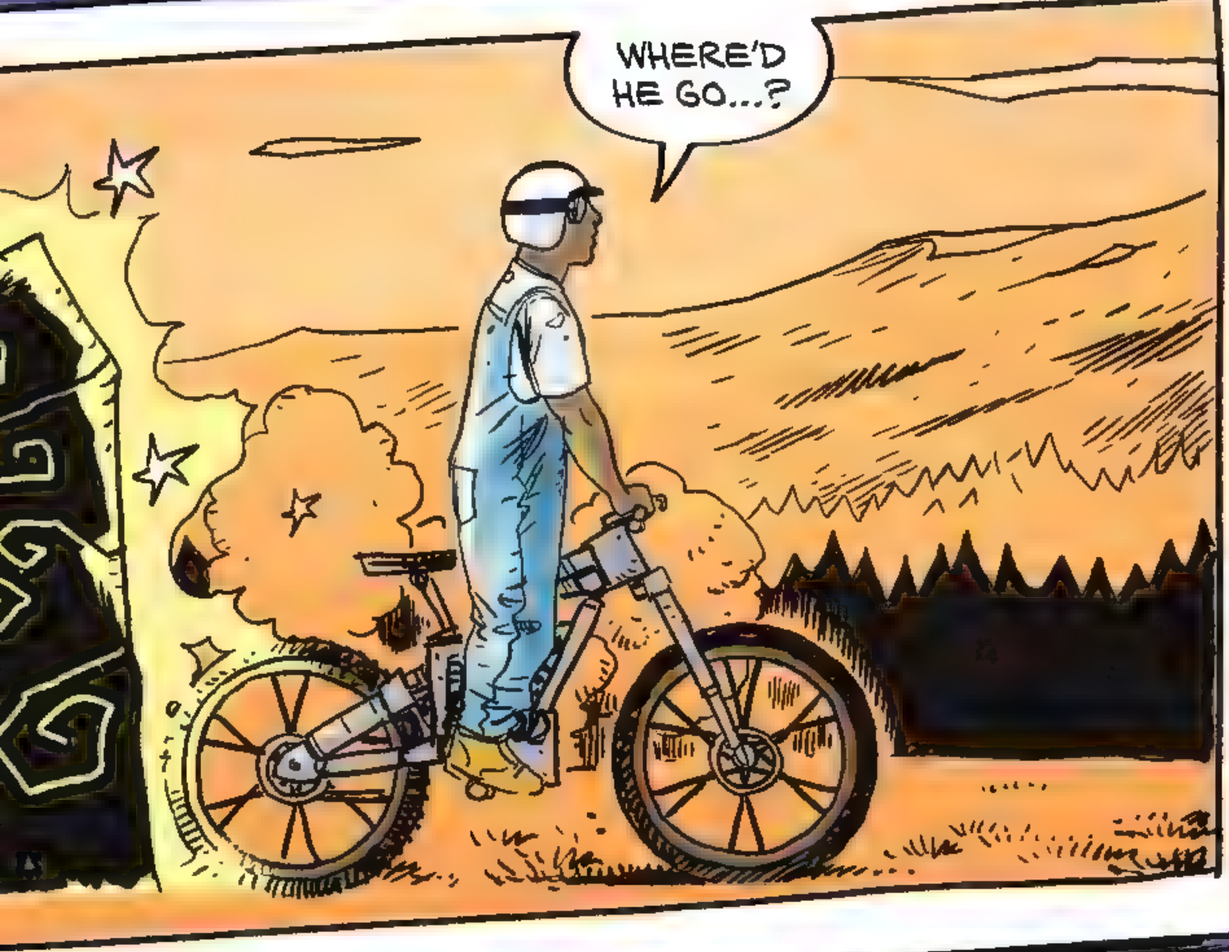

RAN!! GWEN'S DOWN!

ARACK!
THEN HELP HER IF YOU CAN--BUT STICK TO THE PLAN!
YOU WITH US, GWEN?
UGH... AYE.
TO THE STONE!
FFP

THUK
NOW WE GET BACK AND FINISH THE REST OF 'EM.
IF RANI LEFT US ANY.


STOP HIM!

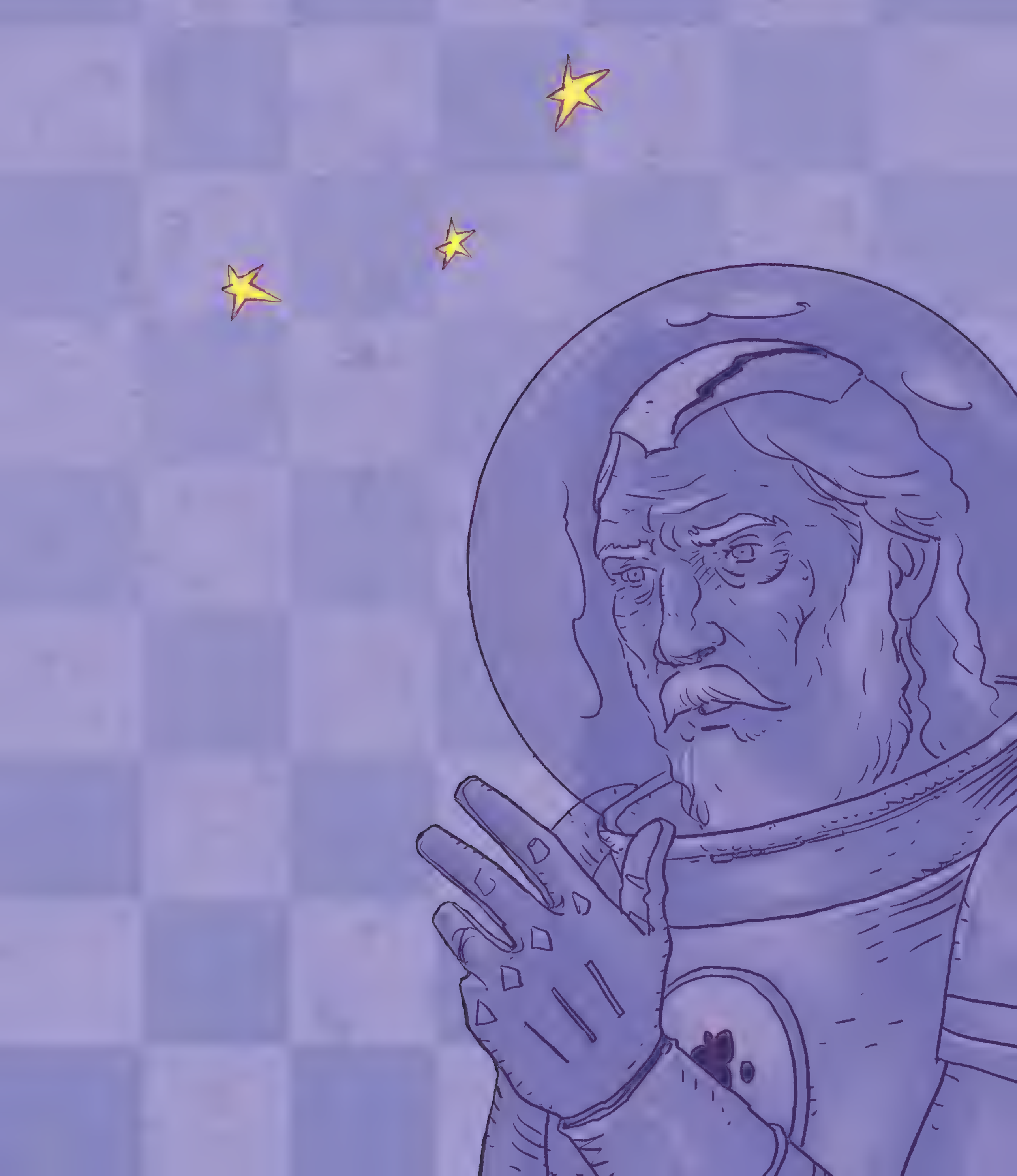

AH!
OOPH!


WHERE'D HE GO...?

I DON'T KNOW HOW, BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM TO PORTLAND.
THEY KNOW MORE ABOUT HOW THESE STONES WORK. I BET THEY WENT HOME TO FAE.
HOME-- SHIT! MY DAD!

SOON...
HOW IS HE?
THEY SAY HE'LL MAKE IT. BUT IF THEY'RE COMING AFTER US LIKE THIS...
...WHO'S NEXT?

CHAPTER FOUR



MOUNT HOOD, OREGON, USA

IT'S THIS ONE HERE, OBVIOUSLY, I GUESS.

SO, WE, WHAT, JUST *STEP* INTO IT?

HONESTLY, THOUGH, MAGIC STONES?

CRAZY, RIGHT?

IT SEEMS TOO--

CORNWALL, ENGLAND

TA-DAAA!

--FAR-FETCHED.

OH, MY.

I FEEL LIKE I JUST ATE SOME BAD FISH...

RANI GOT YOU TWO A HOTEL ROOM UNDER THE NAMES SAMANTHA AND DEAN STRUMMER.

BETTER PULL OVER, I'M GONNA...I THINK I'M GONNA...

YOU OKAY, MR. ARTURUS?

LET'S GET CLEANED UP.

WILL MY DAUGHTER BE JOINING US AT ANY POINT?

HHRRRMPH

TheBarrel of

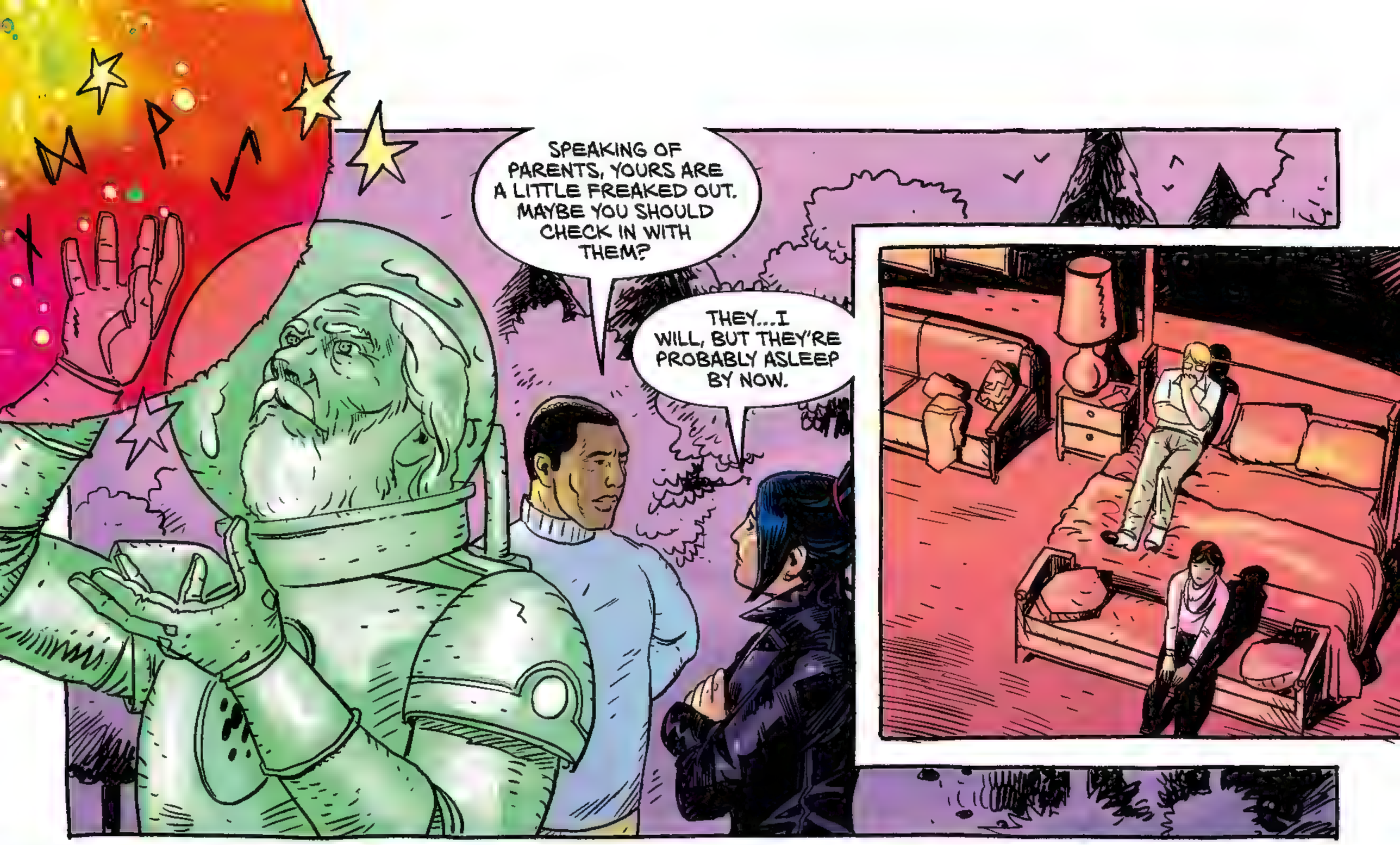
NOT AGAIN...!
YEAH, SHE'S JUST WITH MERLIN ON, YOU KNOW, QUEEN OF HUMANITY BUSINESS... I GUESS.
THIS IS INSANE. SHOULDN'T WE JUST CALL THE POLICE?

THEY WOULDN'T BELIEVE US--MONSTERS AND ALL--AND I DON'T THINK THEY COULD COPE WITH THIS ANYWAY.
AND YOU KIDS CAN?

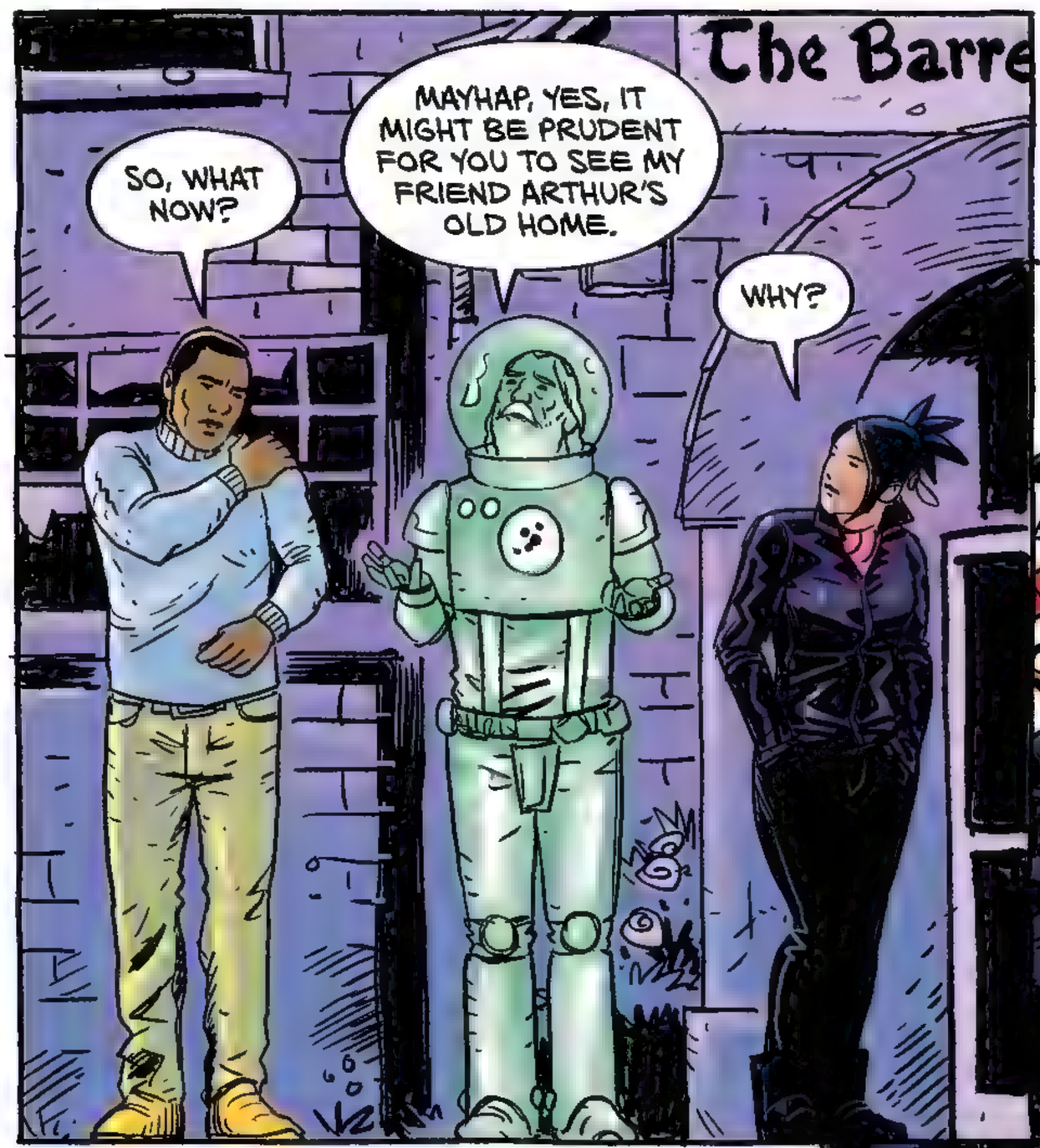
YEAH, THAT WENT WELL.

AH!
THINK I'LL EVER GET USED TO THAT?
IT'D BE WEIRD IF YOU DID.
HM, YES. HELLO.

WHERE'S GWEN? STILL WITH HER DAD?
YEAH, AT THE HOSPITAL. HE'S ROUGHED UP PRETTY BAD, BUT HE'LL PULL THROUGH.
AH, THANK GOD.
GOD. HMM.


SPEAKING OF PARENTS, YOURS ARE A LITTLE FREAKED OUT. MAYBE YOU SHOULD CHECK IN WITH THEM?
THEY...I WILL, BUT THEY'RE PROBABLY ASLEEP BY NOW.

THIS IMPROVED CLOAKING SPELL SHOULD, AH, HIDE YOUR PARENTS, RANI. EVEN WHEN I AM NOT NEAR.
THANK YOU.


The Barre
SO, WHAT NOW?
MAYHAP, YES, IT MIGHT BE PRUDENT FOR YOU TO SEE MY FRIEND ARTHUR'S OLD HOME.
WHY?

I, WELL, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE... INTERESTING.
YES? NO?

PORTLAND, OREGON, USA

SPEAK, MY ARMY UNKNOWN.

WE'RE HIDDEN FROM PRYING EYES-- EVEN THE KING'S.

THERE IS MUCH TALK, BUT WHEN CAN WE POUNCE?

YESSSS, WHEN C'N WE EMERGE FREE INTO THE STINKING HOOMAN WORLD?

SOON, GRUMBOLT. OUR KING HAS FAILED TO DEFEAT OUR BURGEONING THREAT TWICE NOW...

...BUT I'VE WALKED AMONGST THESE CREATURES FOR YEARS. I CAN LEAD US. FEAR NOT.

IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF MOVING THE PIECES INTO PLACE.

WE MUST MAKE SURE THE QUEEN OF HUMANITY AND OUR KING IN SHADOW REMAIN UNAWARE OF OUR PLOT.

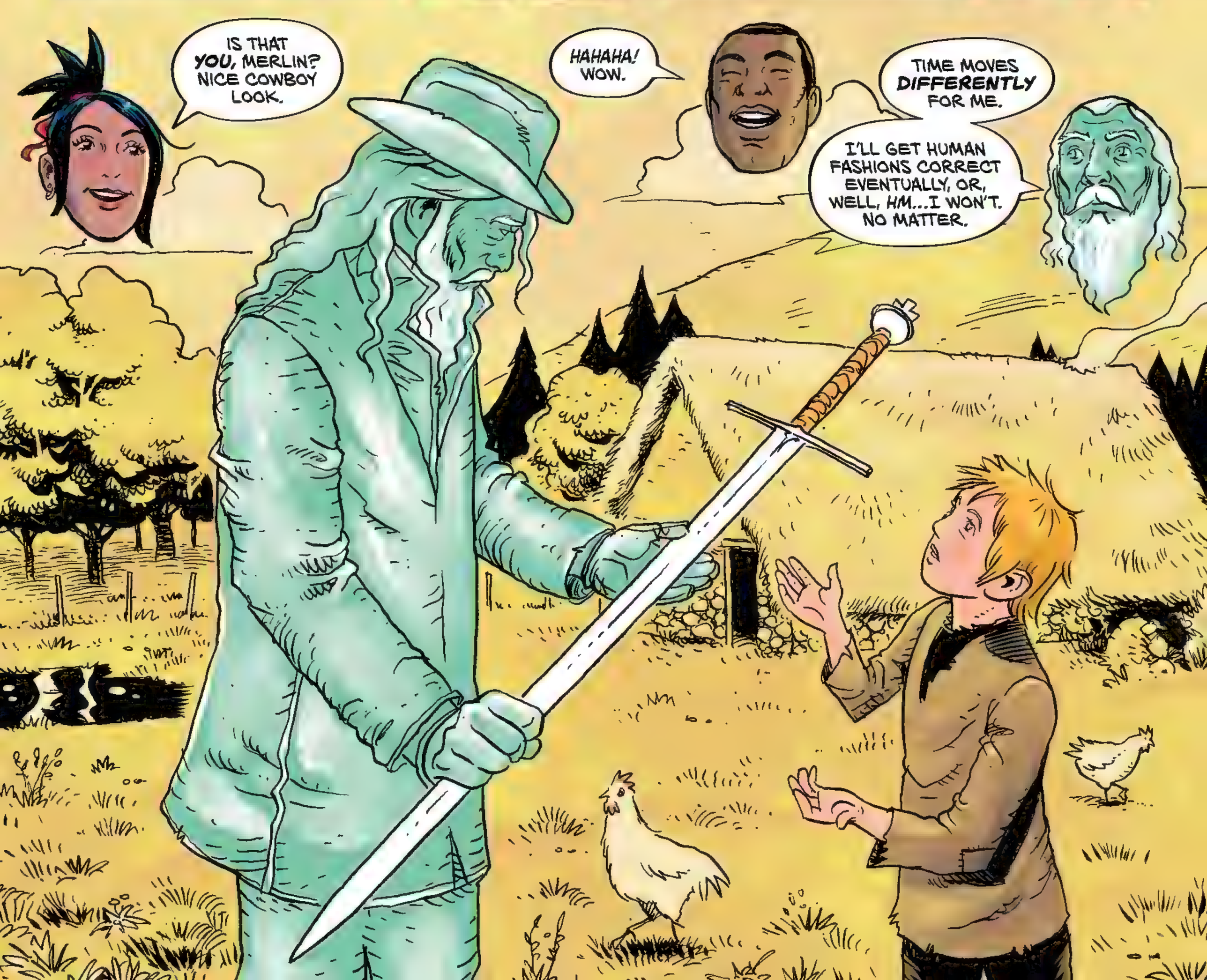
WOULDN'T YOU AGREE, DEAR VLEMP?

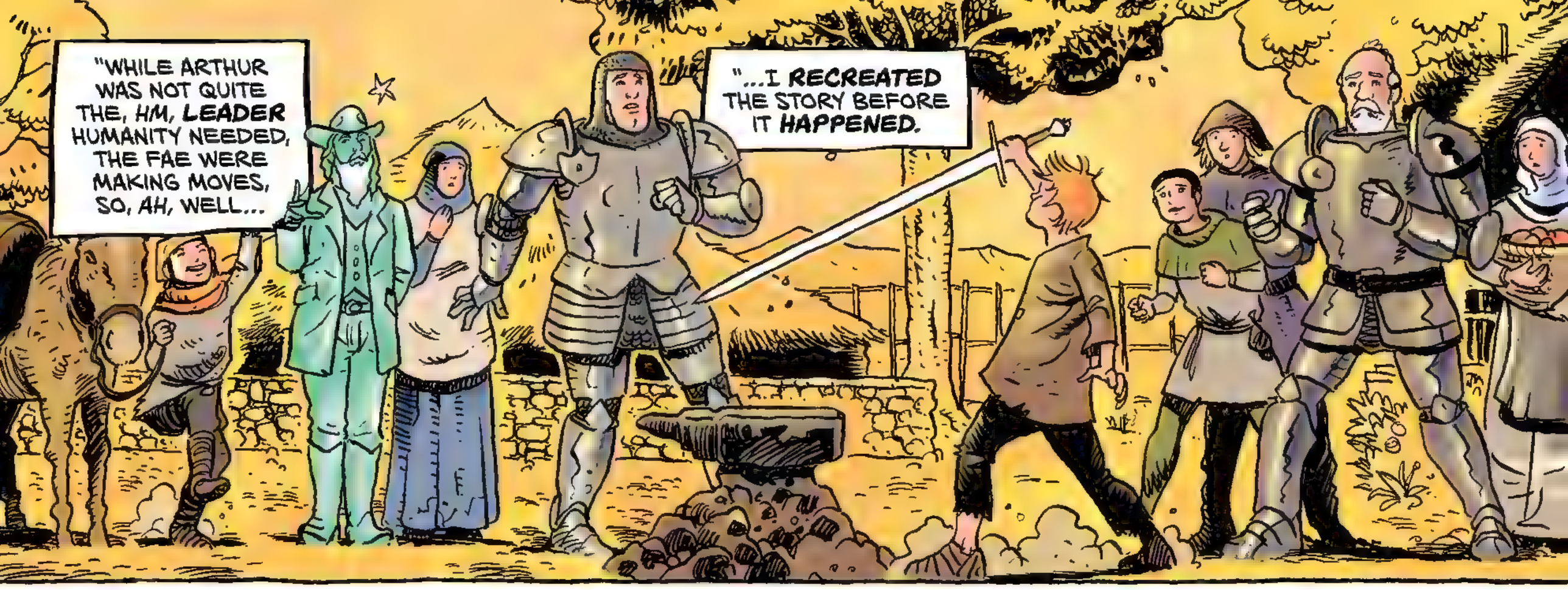
URK!

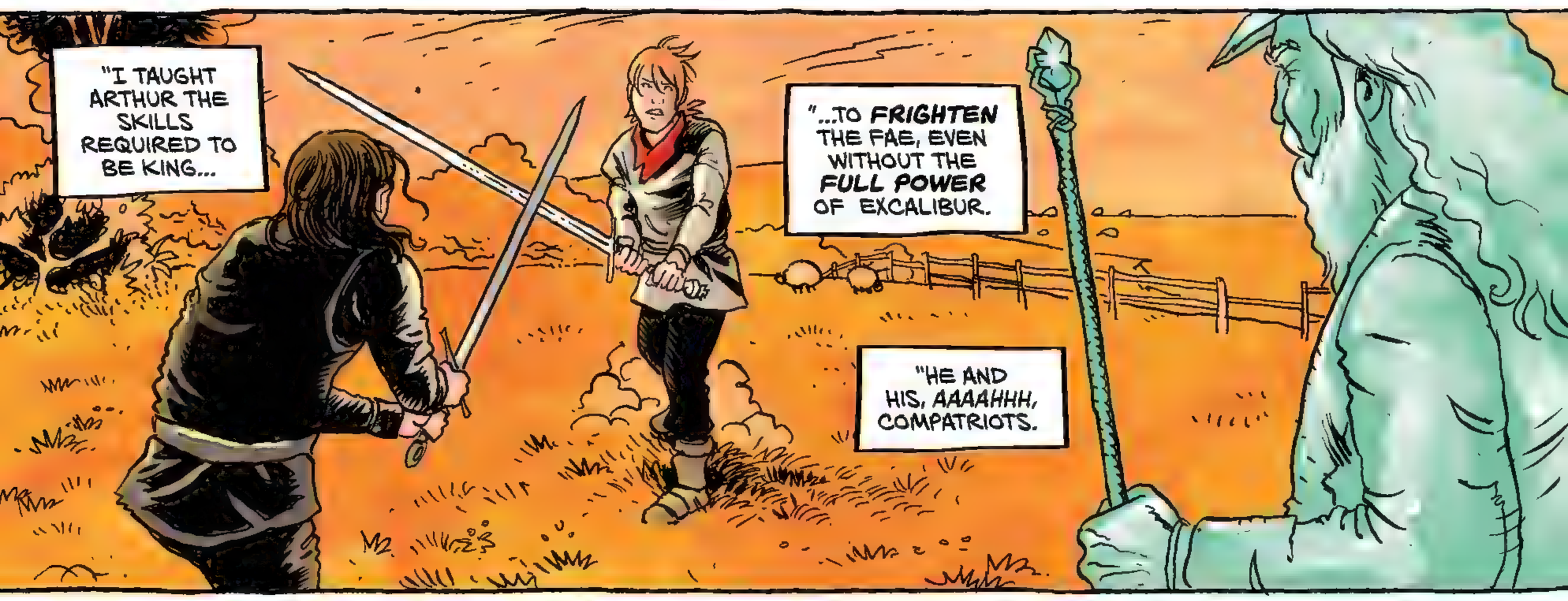
WHERE DO YOUR TRUE LOYALTIES LIE?
WITH...ACK... YOU, M'LADY! OF COURSE!
DO YOU TRULY BELIEVE YOU CAN DECEIVE A DECEIVER?
N-NO, MY QUEEN, PLEASE, I...THE KING...HE GAVE ME NO CHOICE!
HRMP!
IS IT DELICIOUS? THE NATURAL FOOD OF THIS WORLD?
MPFH
GO CRAWLING BACK TO YOUR KING NOW, TRAITOR.
YOU KNOW I CANNOT, MORGANA LE FAE.
WHATEVER WILL YOU DO THEN?
URK!
SKLURCH

SO WHY DO WE NEED BIKES AND CARS AGAIN?
THIS SORT OF TRAVEL IS NOT, AH, EASY. TAXING ON MY BEING. ALSO IT FEELS...FIZZY.
FIZZY. YEAH, THAT'S WHAT IT IS.

WE COULD'VE GOTTEN A TAXI.
I WANT TO KNOW WHY THIS IS JUST AN UNMARKED... NOTHING. NO SHRINE TO KING ARTHUR, OR ANYTHING!
AT TIMES ONE MUST HAVE FLARE, LANCE.
AND I ASSURE YOU, MY QUEEN, EVEN THIS SMALL CHURCH TO COMMERCE IS MORE, AH, IMPRESSIVE THAN ARTHUR'S HUMBLE CHILDHOOD ABODE.


IS THAT YOU, MERLIN? NICE COWBOY LOOK.
HAHAHA! WOW.
TIME MOVES DIFFERENTLY FOR ME.
I'LL GET HUMAN FASHIONS CORRECT EVENTUALLY, OR, WELL, HM...I WON'T. NO MATTER.


"WHILE ARTHUR WAS NOT QUITE THE, *HM*, **LEADER** HUMANITY NEEDED, THE FAE WERE MAKING MOVES, SO, *AH*, WELL...
"...I **RECREATED** THE STORY BEFORE IT **HAPPENED.**

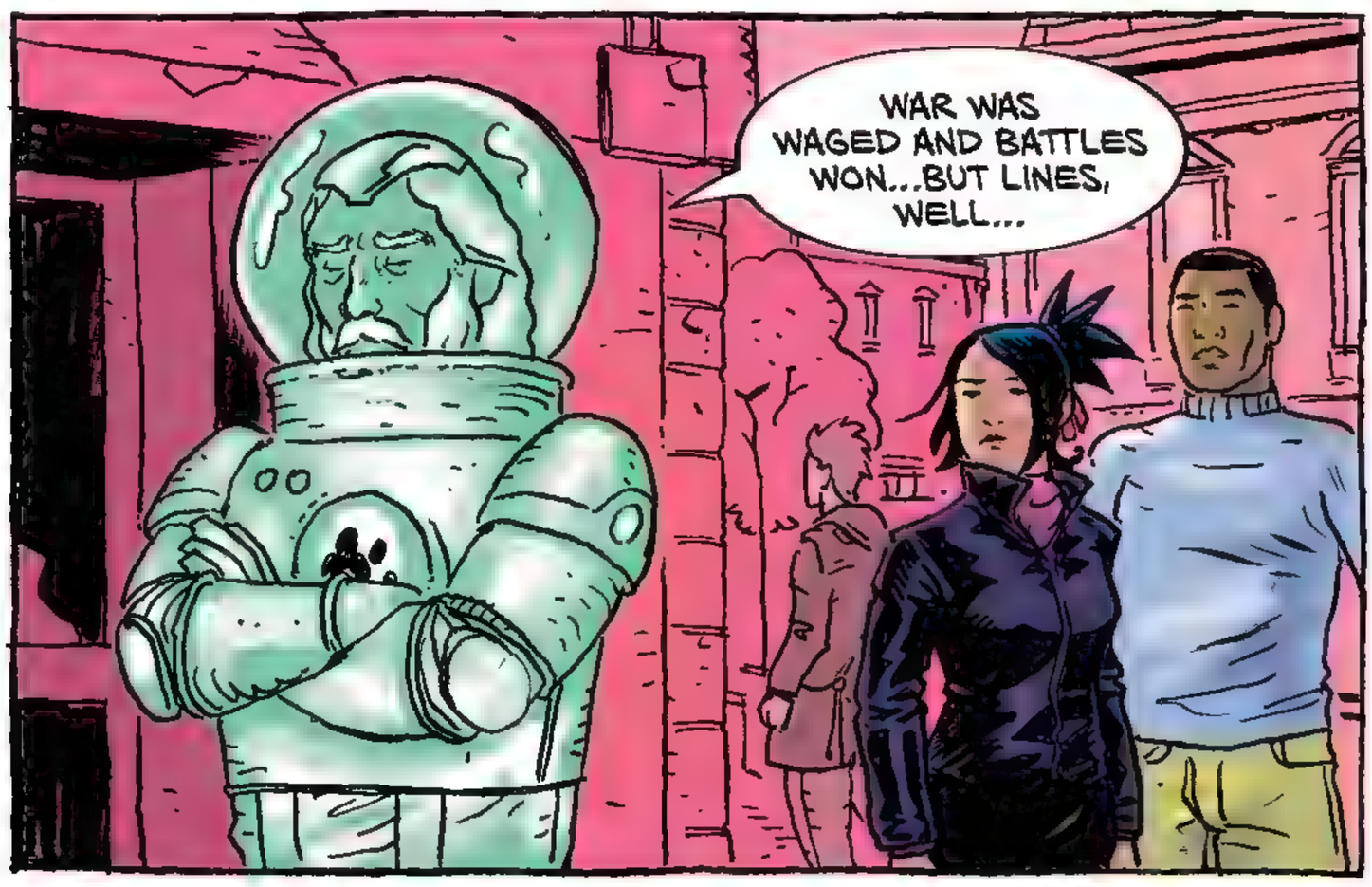

"I TAUGHT ARTHUR THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO BE KING...
"...TO **FRIGHTEN** THE FAE, EVEN WITHOUT THE **FULL POWER** OF EXCALIBUR.
"HE AND HIS, *AAAAHHH*, COMPATRIOTS.

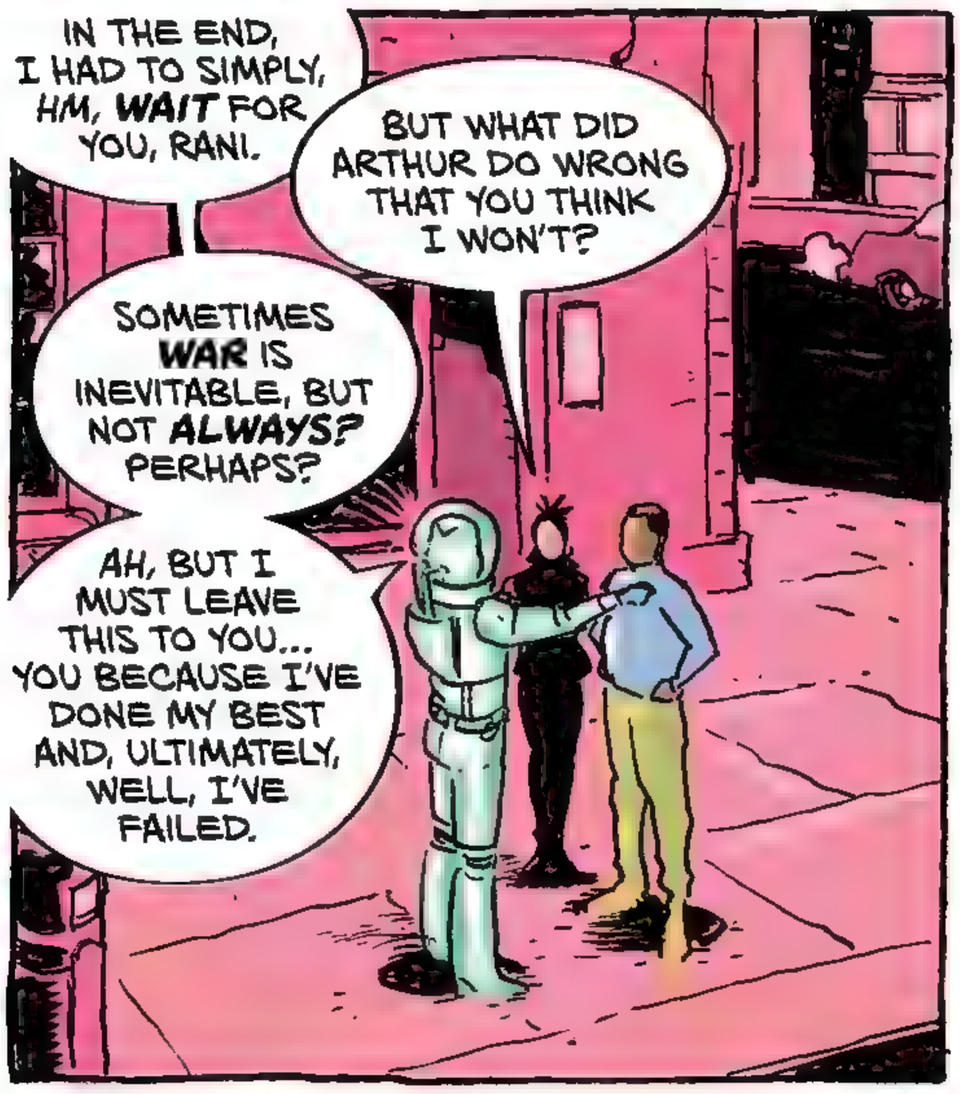
"TO HIM IT WAS A **LIFETIME,** BUT TO ME, WELL, IT ALL HAPPENED AT ONCE.
"CHILD TO ADULT IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.

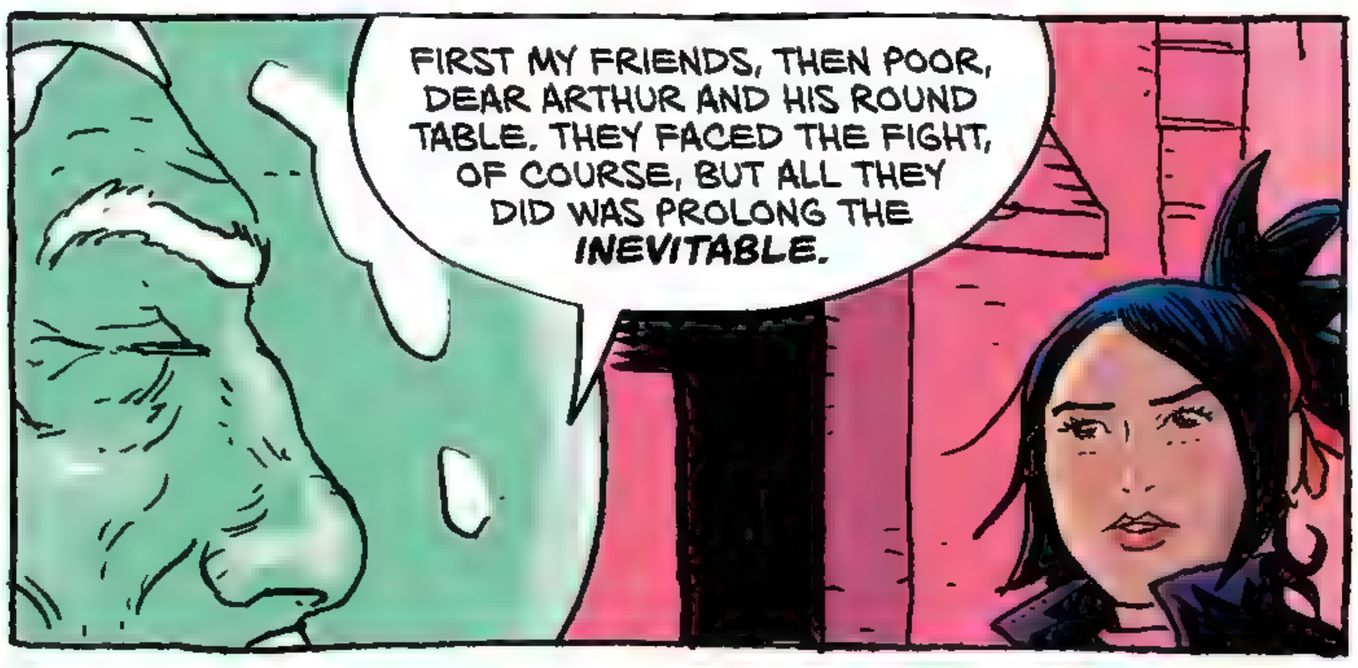
"HAVING ARTHUR ASSUME THE ROLE OF KING WAS MY ATTEMPT AT PEACE, AND A...DISTRACTION WHILE I ENSURED THE WALLS BETWIXT FAE AND EARTH REMAINED **STRONG.**

"HE DID WHAT I HAD *TASKED* HIM TO DO OVERALL, JUST, AH...

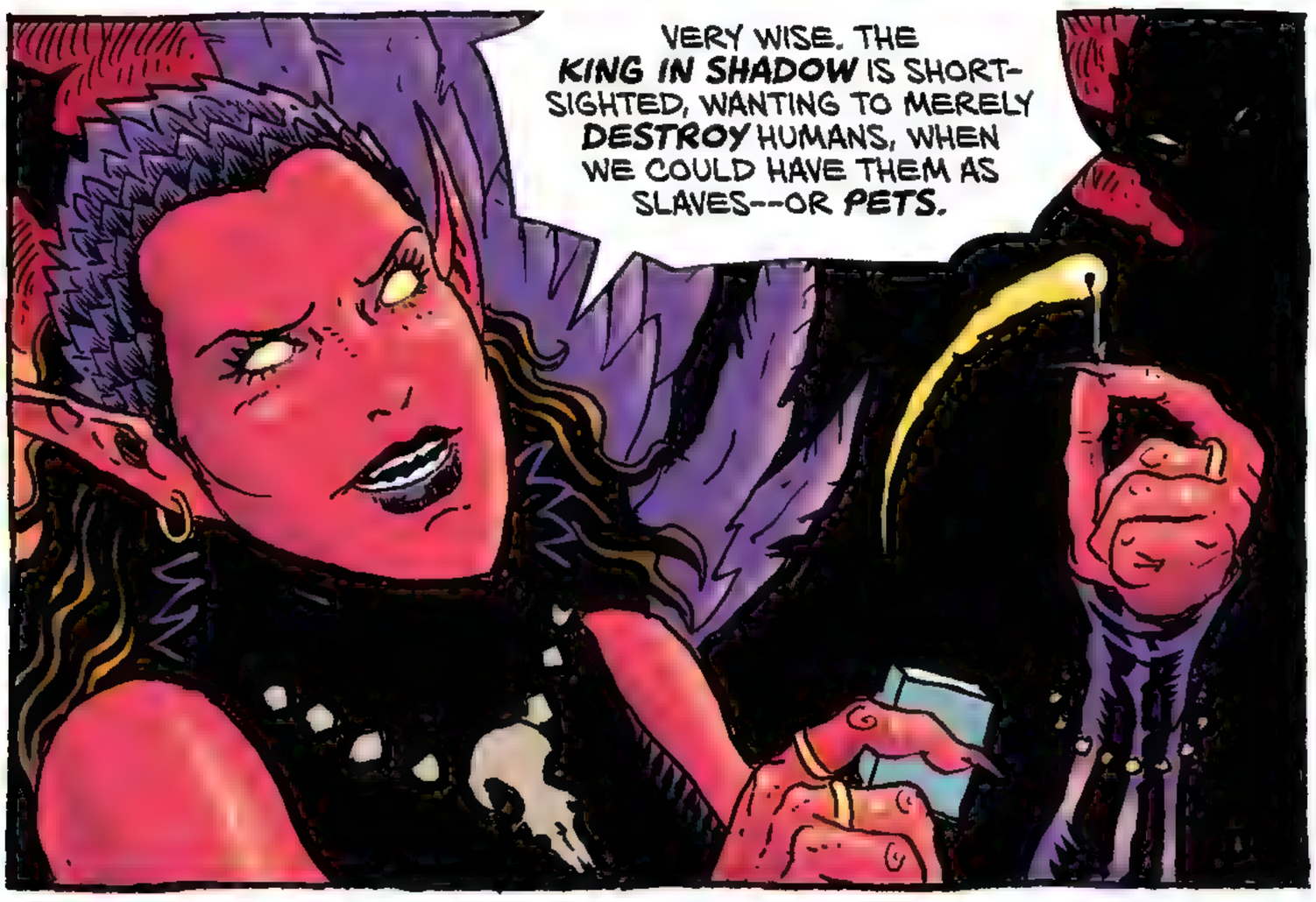
"...NOT QUITE AS I'D *HOPED*."





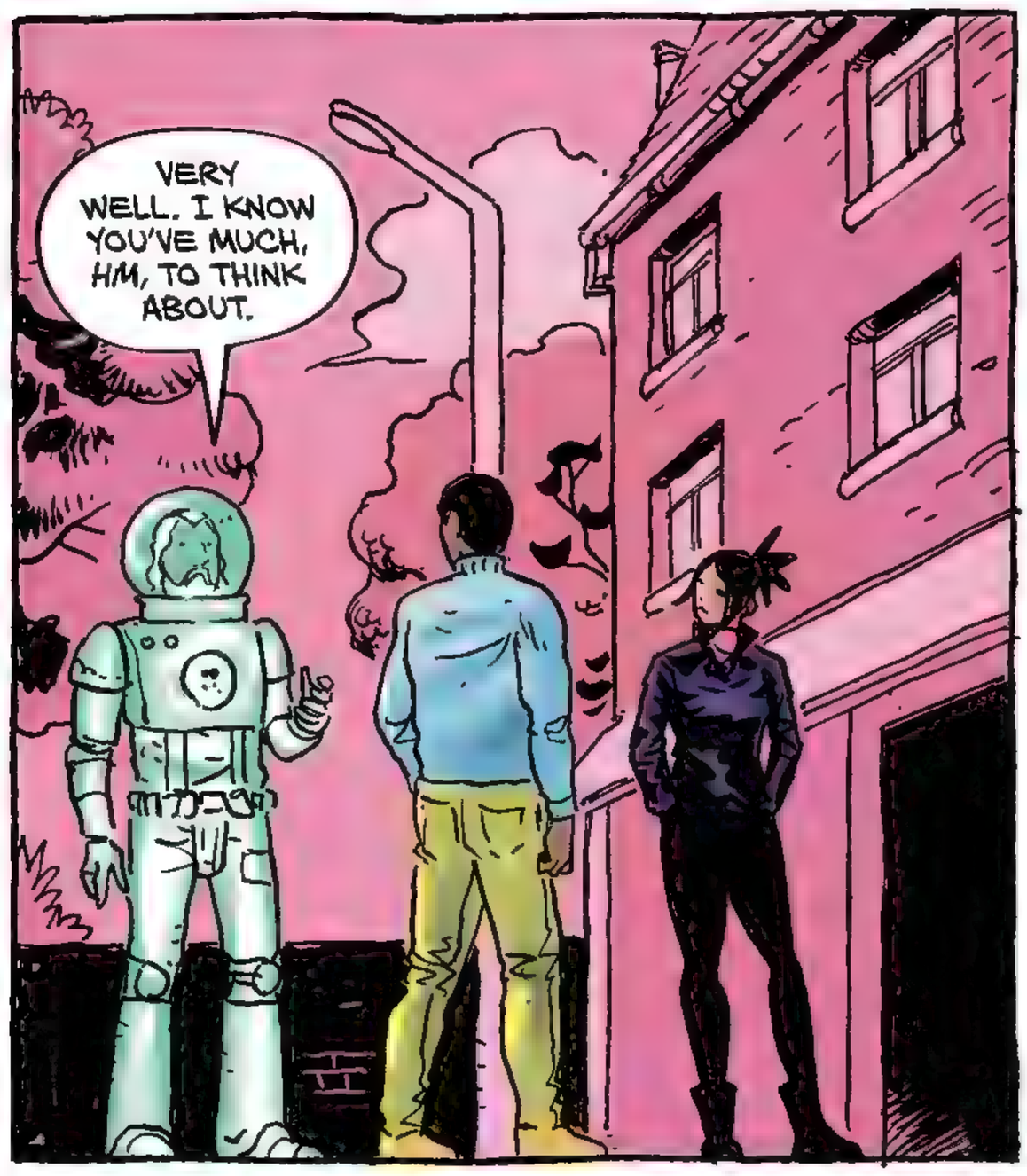


ANY MORE DUPLICITOUS FAE IN OUR MIDST?
OF COURSE NOT!
NO!
WE ARE YOUR **ARMY**, MORGANA!



AH, WELL, I SHOULD GET YOU TWO BACK TO DURGA AND WILLIAM.
WE'LL SEE OURSELVES BACK, MERLIN. DON'T TIRE YOURSELF.

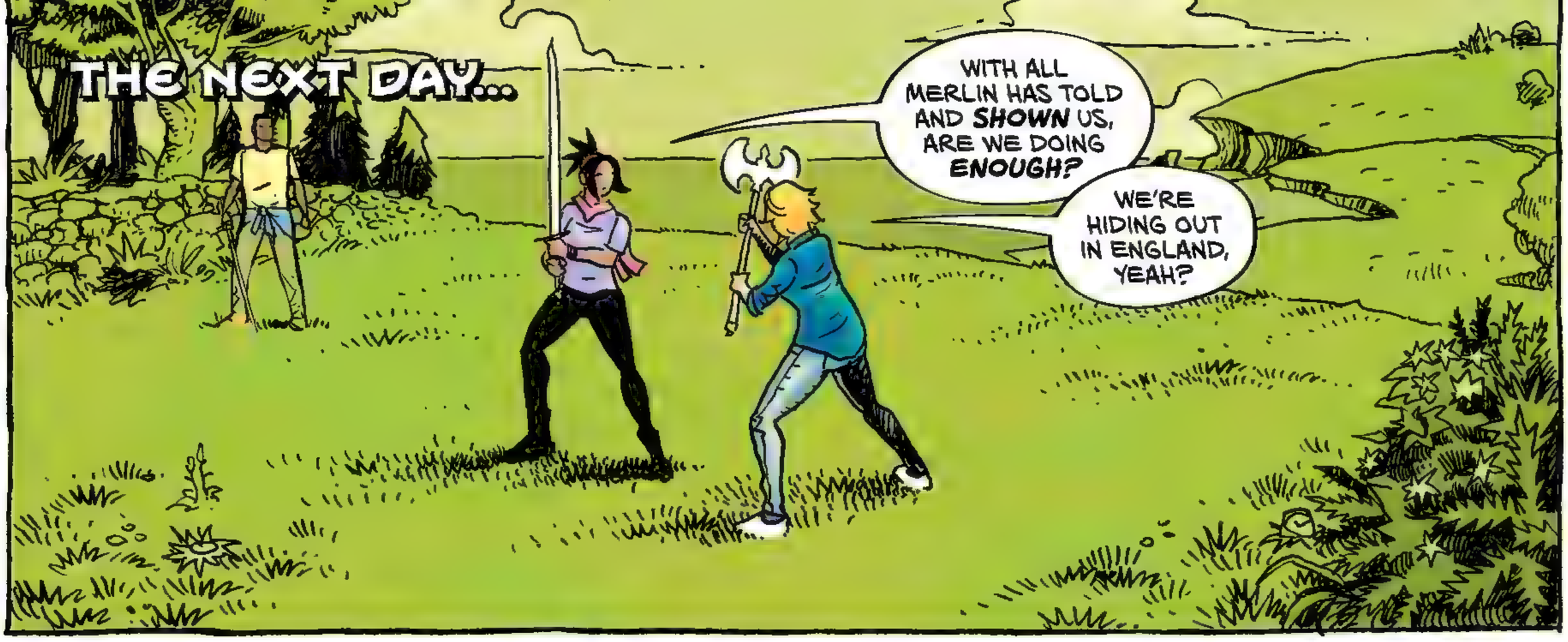
A WALK WOULD BE NICE ANYWAY.

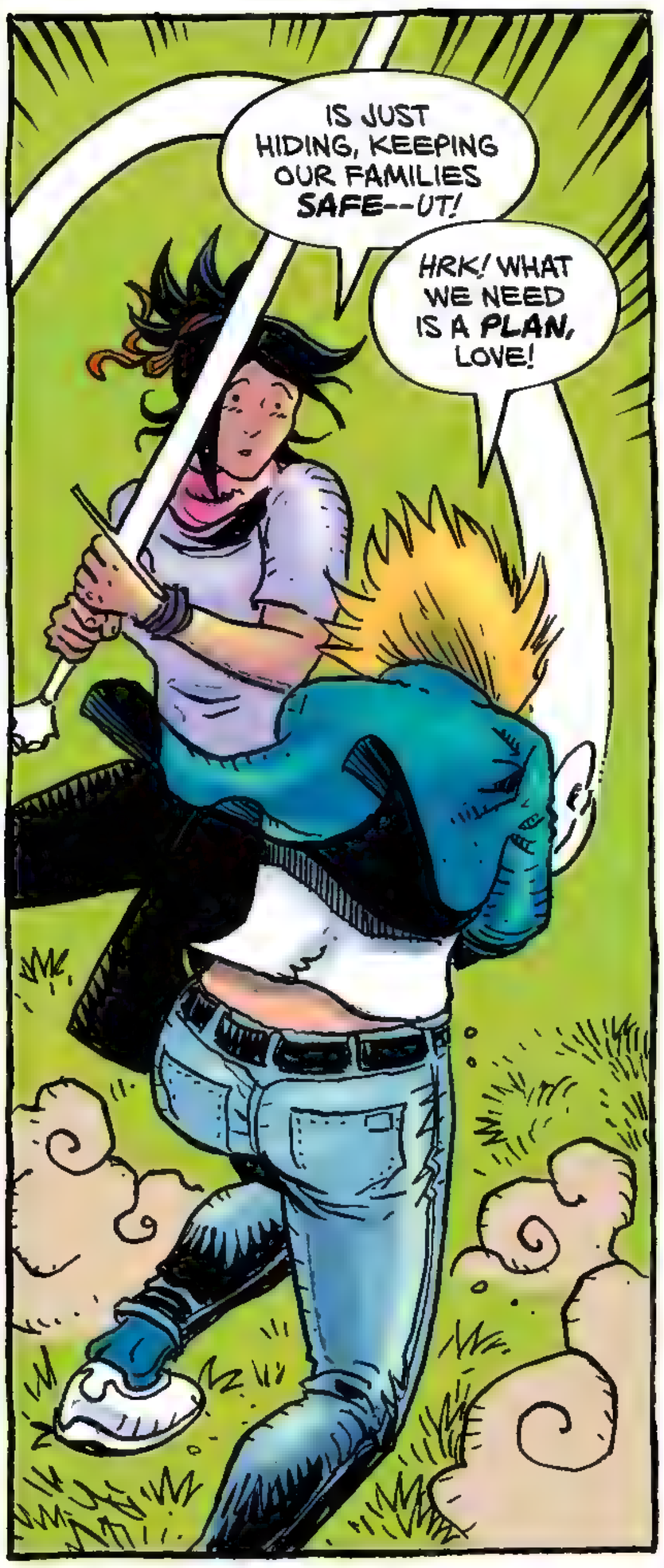

VERY WELL. I KNOW YOU'VE MUCH, HM, TO THINK ABOUT.

I WILL BE AROUND IF YOU NEED ME.
ALWAYS AROUND.

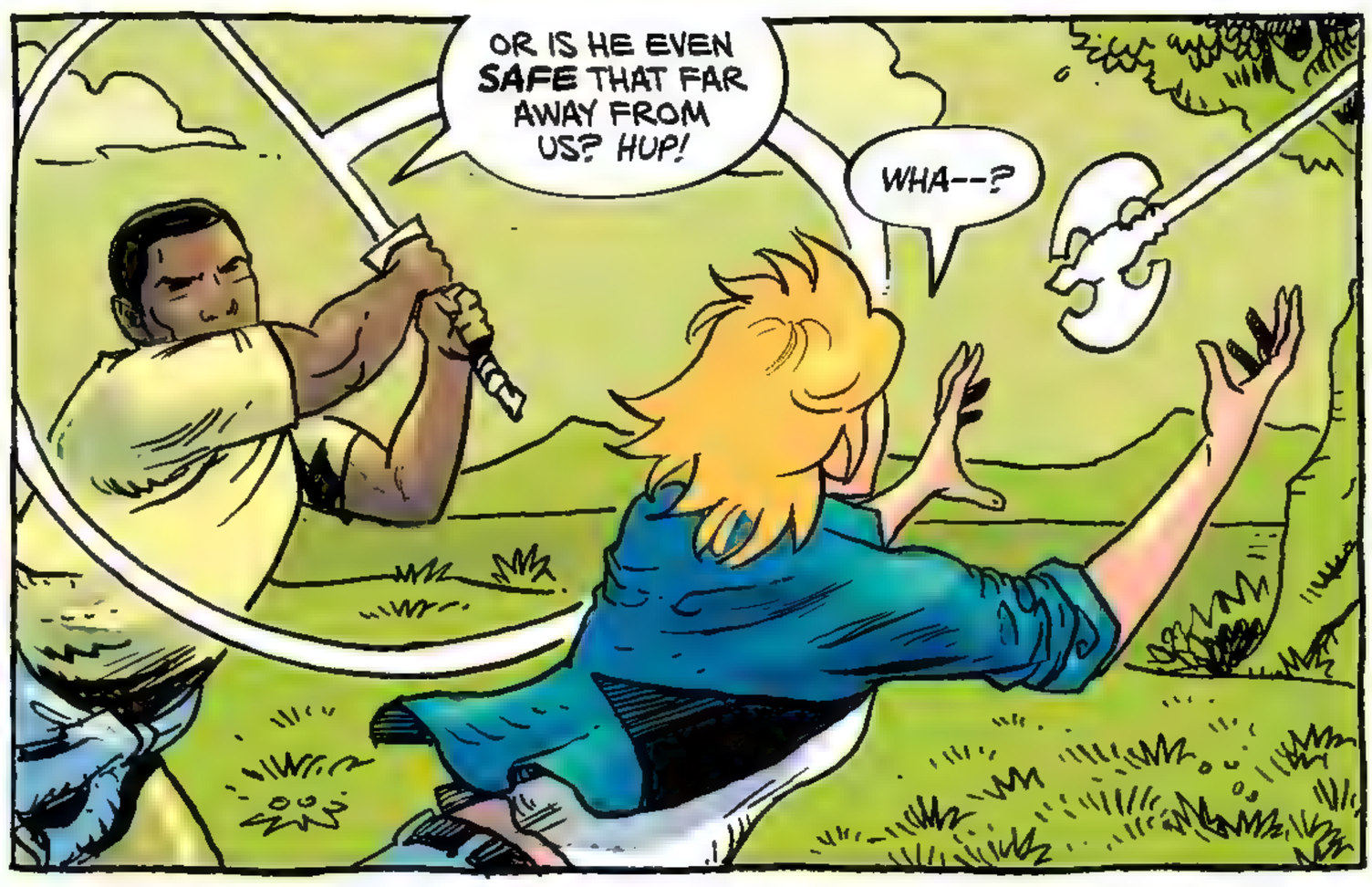
THIS IS NICE.
HM? OH, YEAH.

TEXTING GWEN, FILLING HER IN.
OF COURSE. RIGHT.


THE NEXT DAY...
WITH ALL MERLIN HAS TOLD AND SHOWN US, ARE WE DOING ENOUGH?
WE'RE HIDING OUT IN ENGLAND, YEAH?

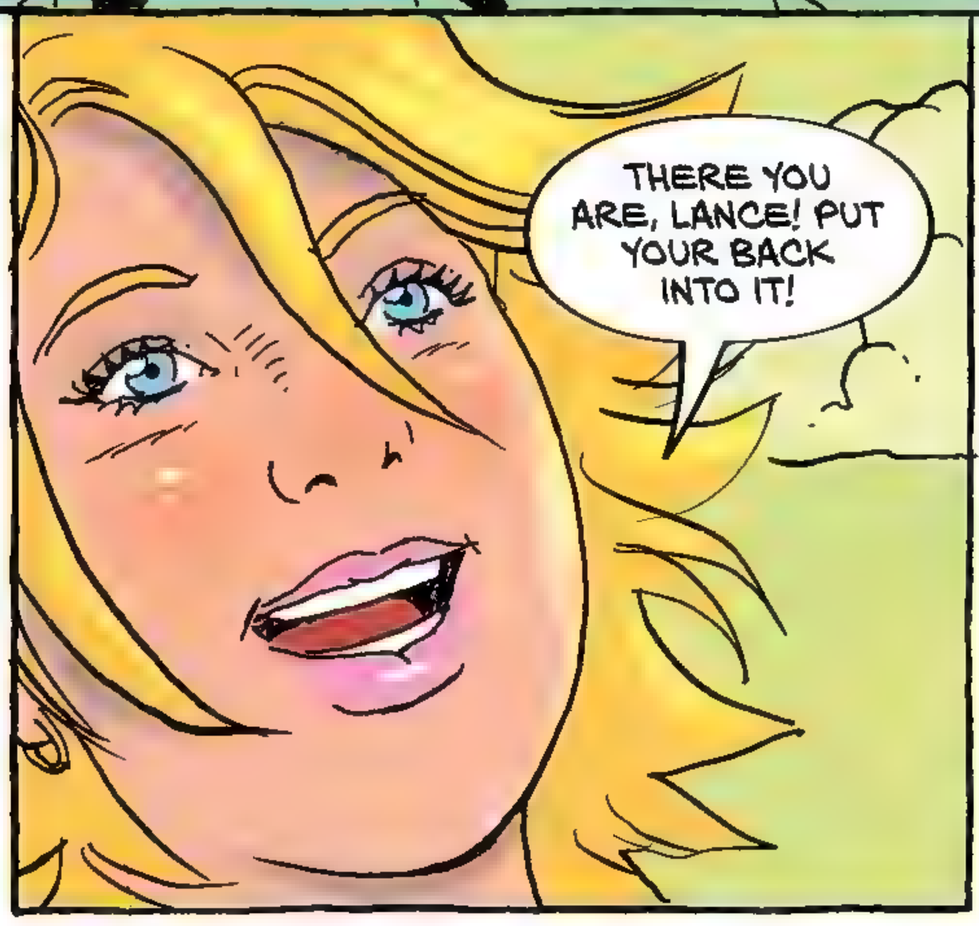

IS JUST HIDING, KEEPING OUR FAMILIES SAFE--UT!
HRK! WHAT WE NEED IS A PLAN, LOVE!

MY UNCLE LOCH WENT TO L.A., BUT WHAT ABOUT WHEN HE COMES BACK?
CLANK

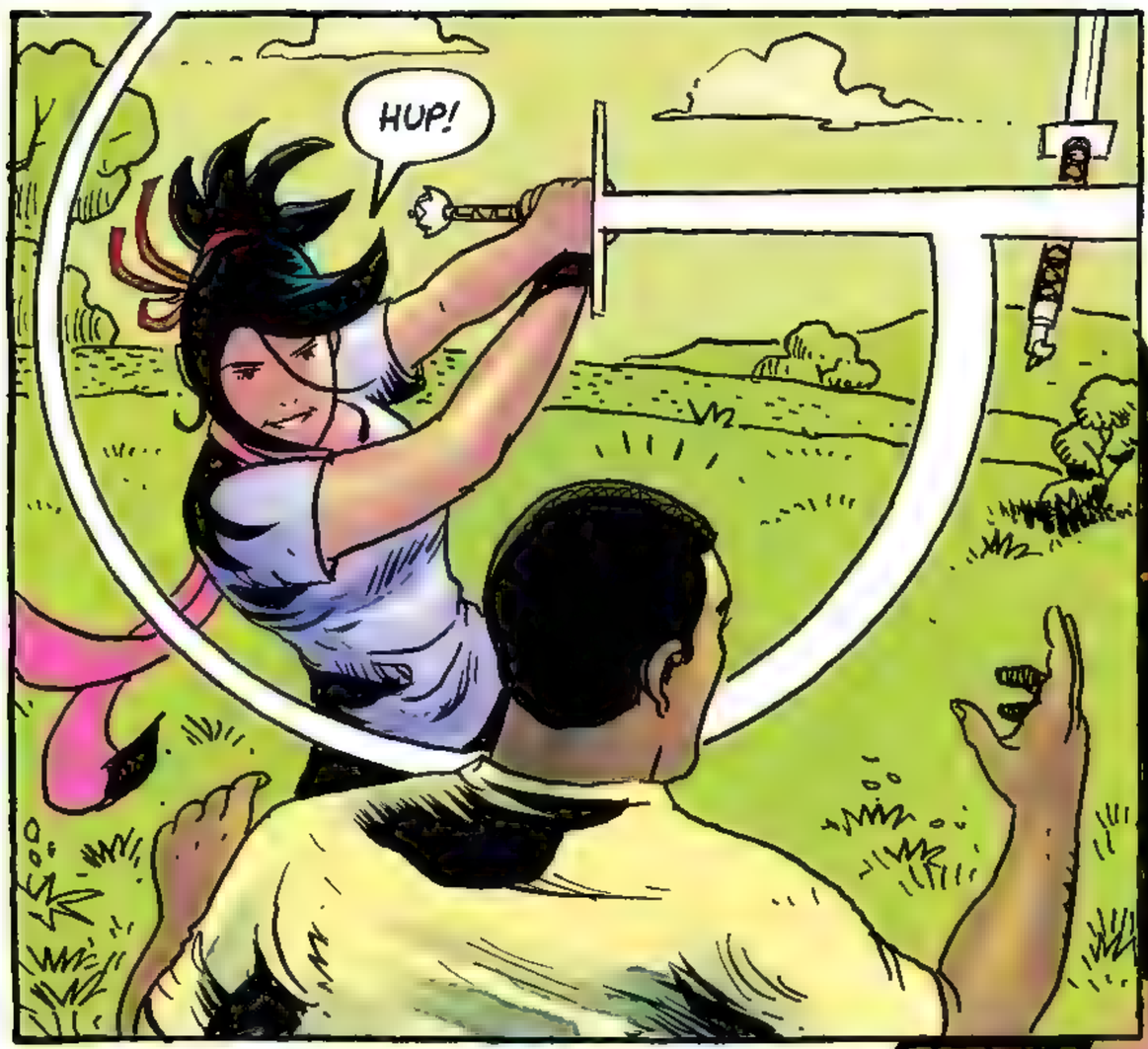

OR IS HE EVEN SAFE THAT FAR AWAY FROM US? HUP!
WHA--?

NICE, LANCE.
THANKS.
BUT, YEAH, WE AREN'T SURE IF THE FAE HAVE SPIES WATCHING EVERYONE--MERLIN DOESN'T EVEN KNOW...

...BUT HOPEFULLY HIDING OUT IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS WILL BUY US SOME TIME AT LEAST.
CLANG


THERE YOU ARE, LANCE! PUT YOUR BACK INTO IT!

HHRAH!
WOW!

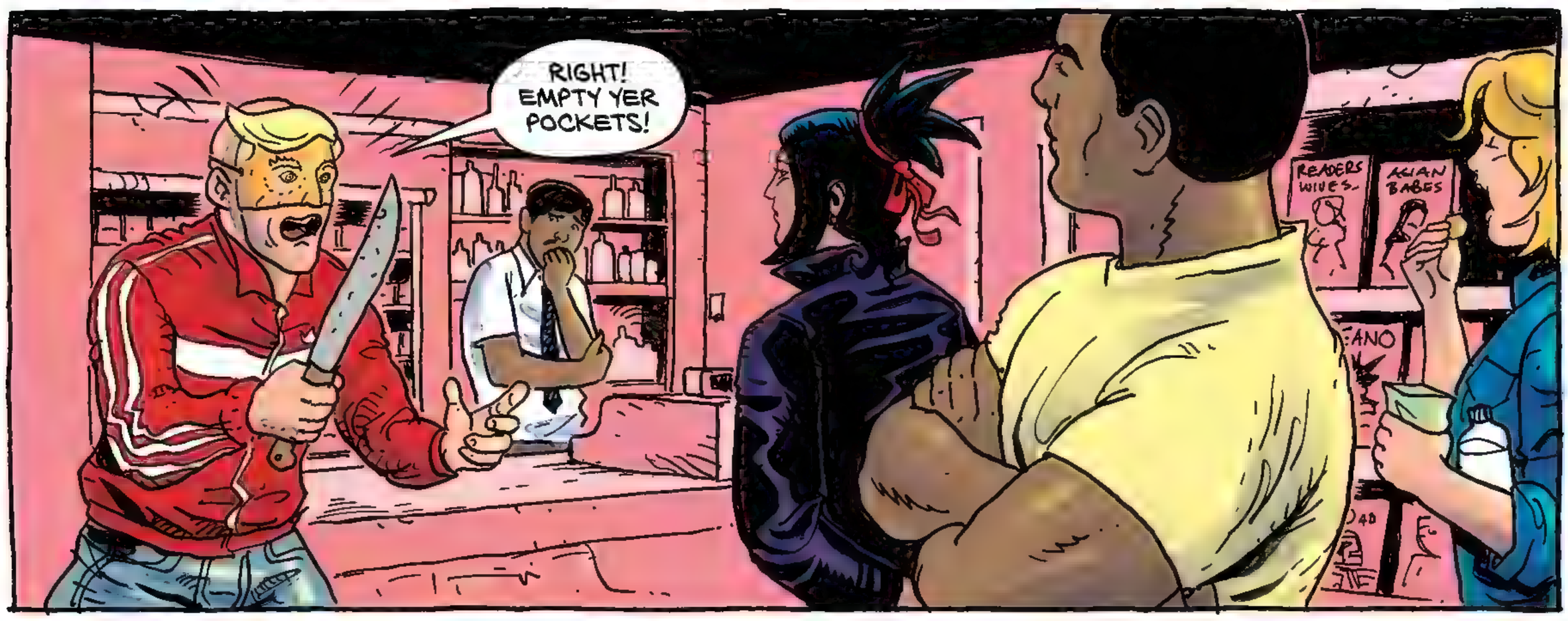

HUP!

YEAH... WOW.
YOU ALMOST HAD ME--AND, MORE IMPRESSIVELY, EXCALIBUR.

YOU TWO ARE GOOD AT THIS!
ANYONE THIRSTY?

NEWSAGENT
OFF LICENCE
WHERE'D YOU LEARN THOSE MOVES, LANCE?
SAMURAI MOVIES.
HAHA! THE FAE SHALL TREMBLE IN FEAR BECAUSE YOU'VE SEEN SOME KUROSAWA!

...'ELLO.
Lovely dog for GUINNESS
YEAH. HI.
IS SOME-THING...?

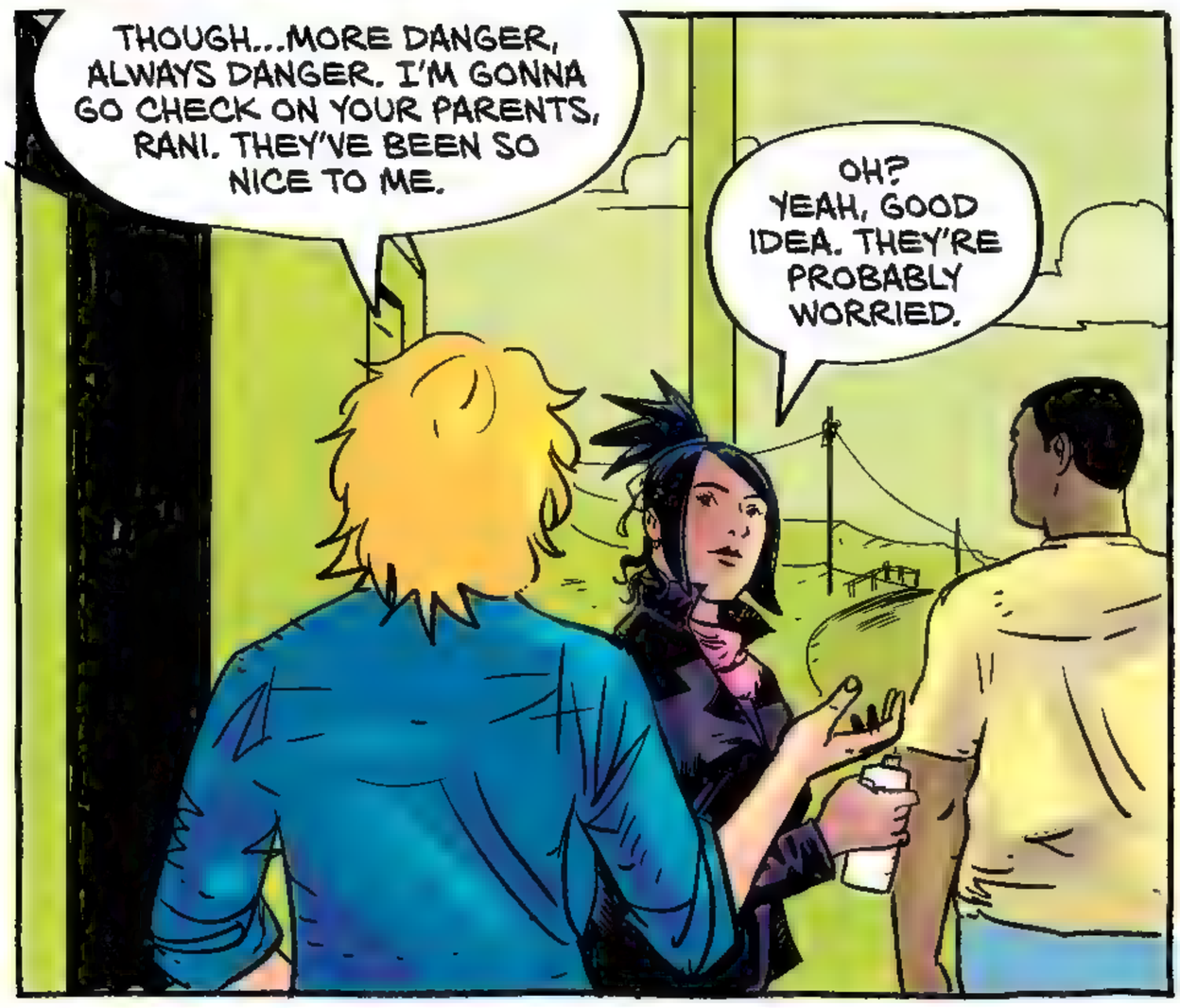

RIGHT! EMPTY YER POCKETS!
READERS WIVES.
ASIAN BABES

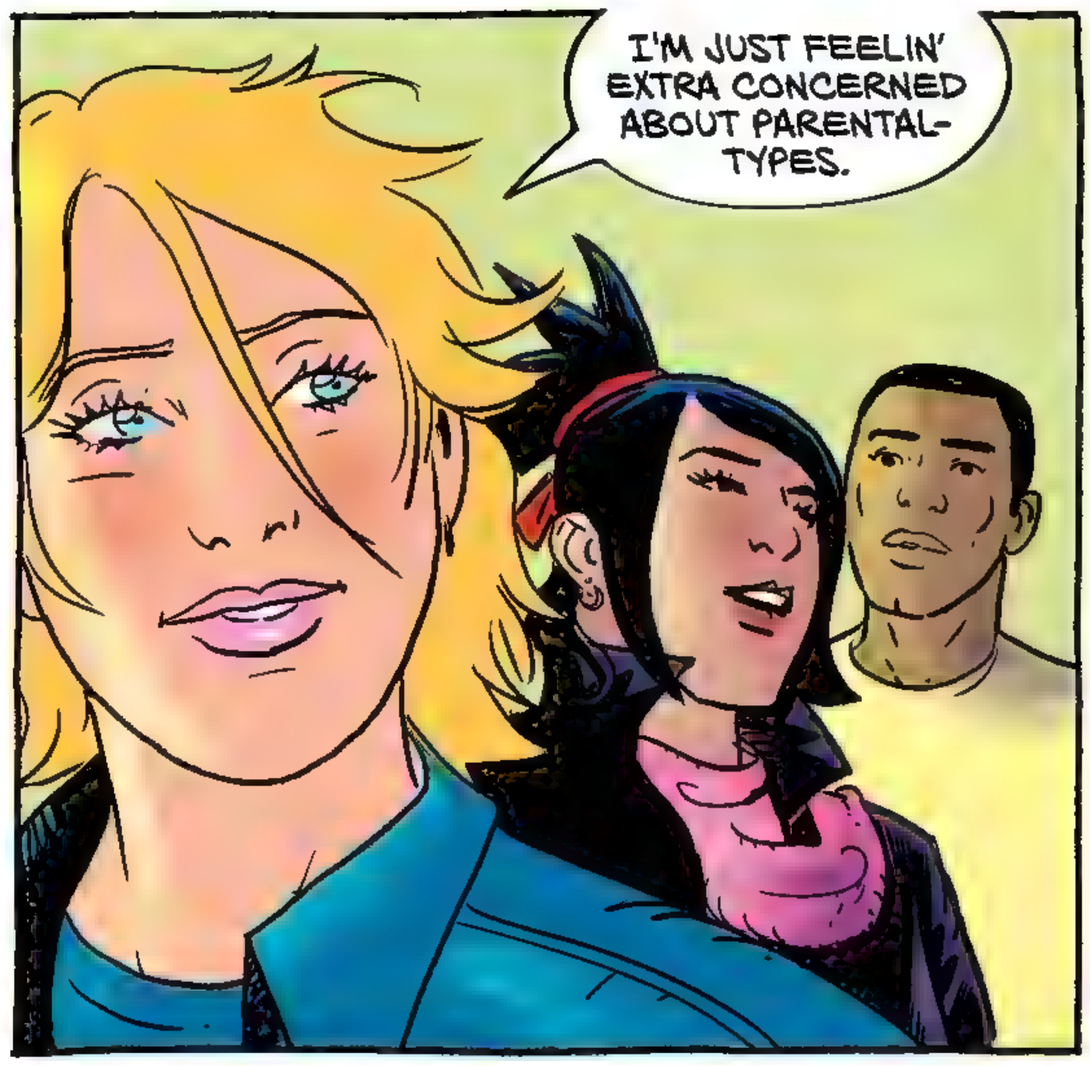
HOW 'BOUT YOU DROP YER BUTTER KNIFE INSTEAD?

RIGHT! SORRY!

NICE TO JUST HELP OUT.
YEAH, MAYBE WE NEED SOME SUPERHERO COSTUMES.
NO ONE LOOKS GOOD IN THAT MUCH SPANDEX...

IT'S ON THE HOUSE. THANK YE!
FINALLY, SOME PERKS TO ALL OF THIS!
THANK YOU.


THOUGH...MORE DANGER, ALWAYS DANGER. I'M GONNA GO CHECK ON YOUR PARENTS, RANI. THEY'VE BEEN SO NICE TO ME.
OH? YEAH, GOOD IDEA. THEY'RE PROBABLY WORRIED.


I'M JUST FEELIN' EXTRA CONCERNED ABOUT PARENTAL-TYPES.

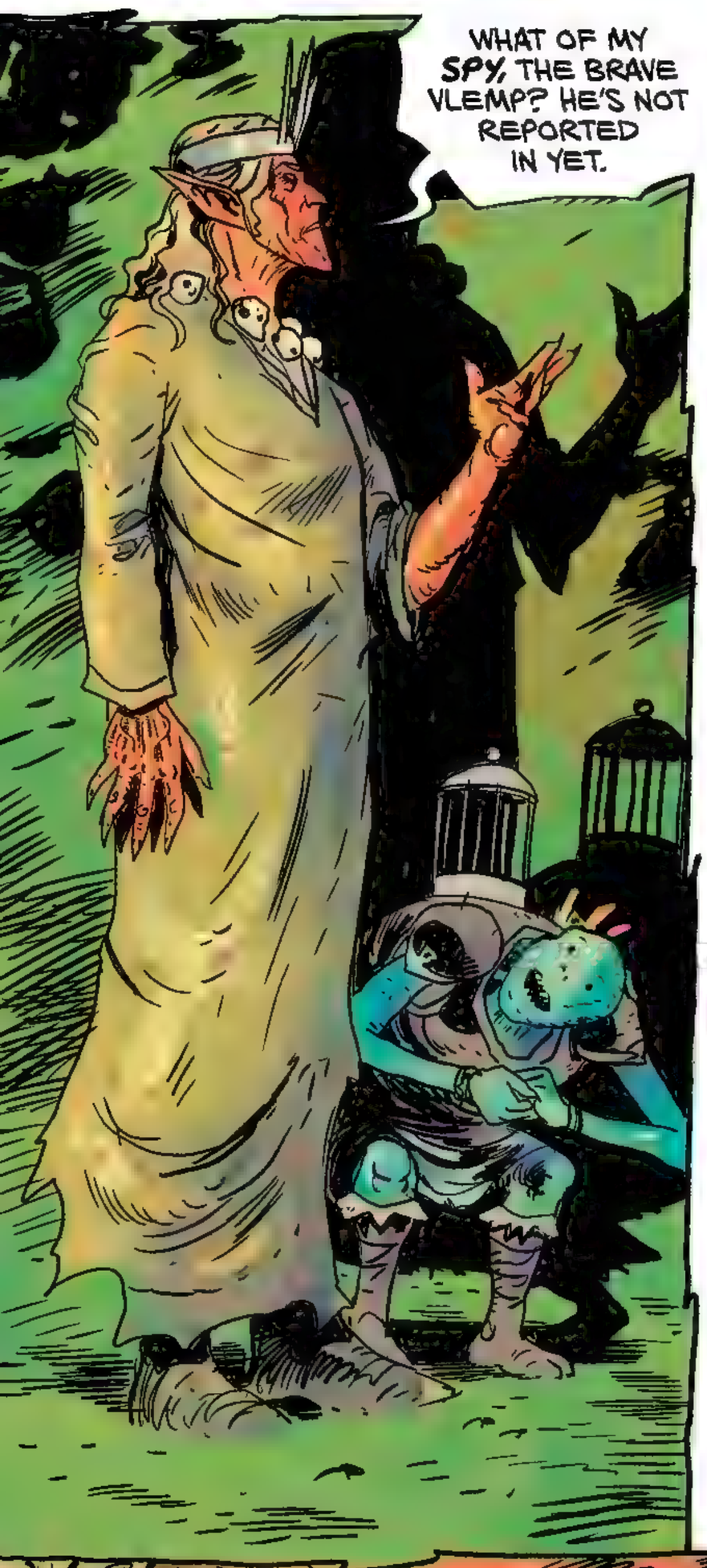
YEAH, TOTALLY. LET'S GO.
NAH! I GOT THIS.

YOU TWO SHOULD GET SOME DINNER.
TOGETHER, YEAH?

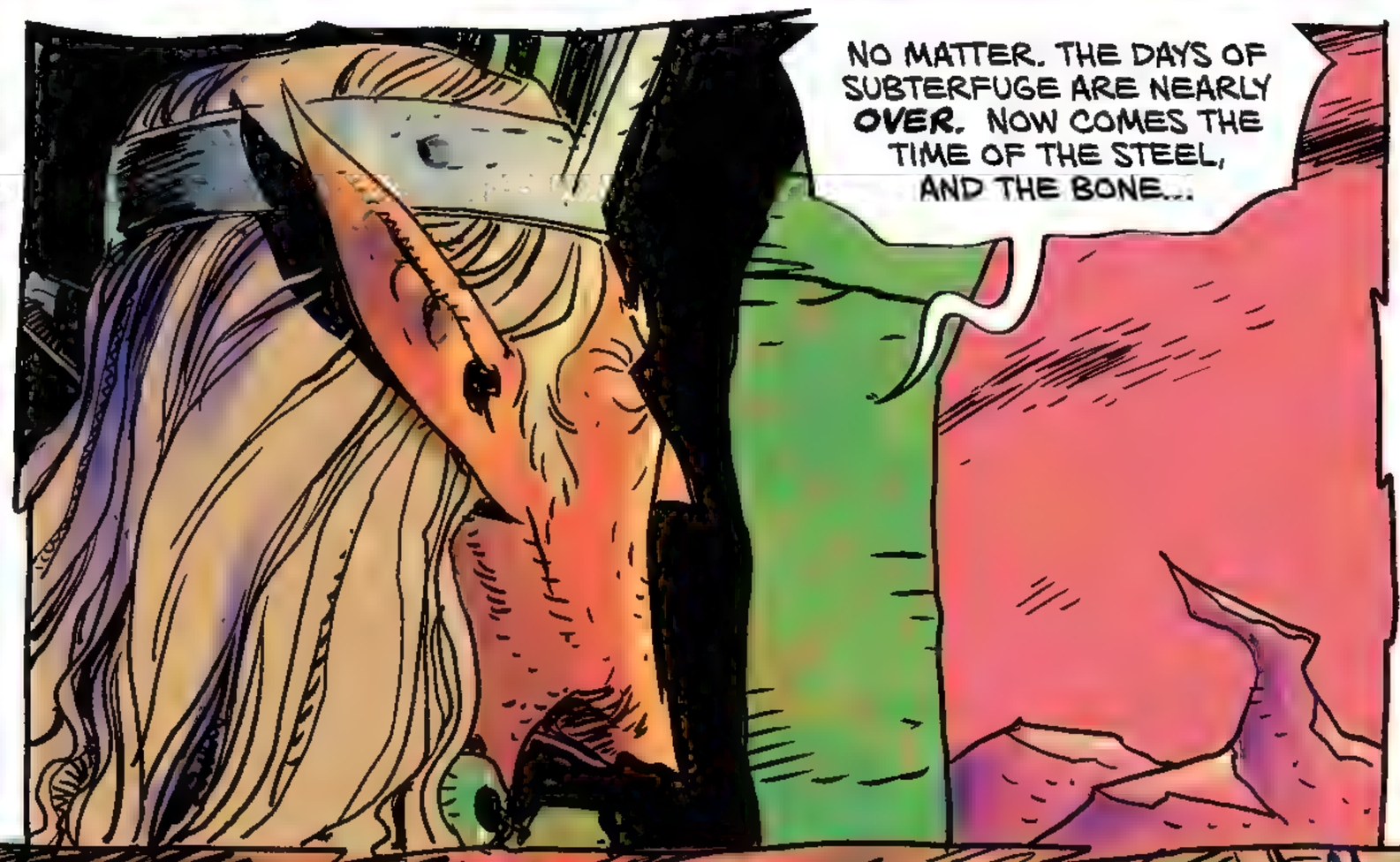
WHAT SAY YOU, DEATHSINGER?
DO WE MOVE, OR MUST WE STILL WAIT?
ALLOW ME TO DIVINE, MY KING.
MAYHAP I SHOULD FOLD MORGANA'S ARMY OF UNKNOWN INTO MY OWN SHADOW ARMY...SMITE HER MINOR UPRISING AND THEN TAKE OUT THIS FEEBLE HUMAN QUEEN IN ONE FELL SWOOP.
SQUAWK!
CRAK
HMMM... THE SPATTER SPEAKS...
IT IS AS YOU SUSPECT, MY KING! YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WILL MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.

AH, YES, WISE DEATHSINGER. SO I SHALL. AND I KNOW JUST THE TIME--WHEN THE BETRAYER IS EXPOSED.
S·U·B
P·O·P

TRULY 'TIS YOU WHO ARE THE WISE ONE, MY KING.


WHAT OF MY SPY, THE BRAVE VLEMP? HE'S NOT REPORTED IN YET.

I'VE SEEN ALL THAT I CAN, SIRE.
A MILLION APOLOGIES.
S·U·B
P·O·P

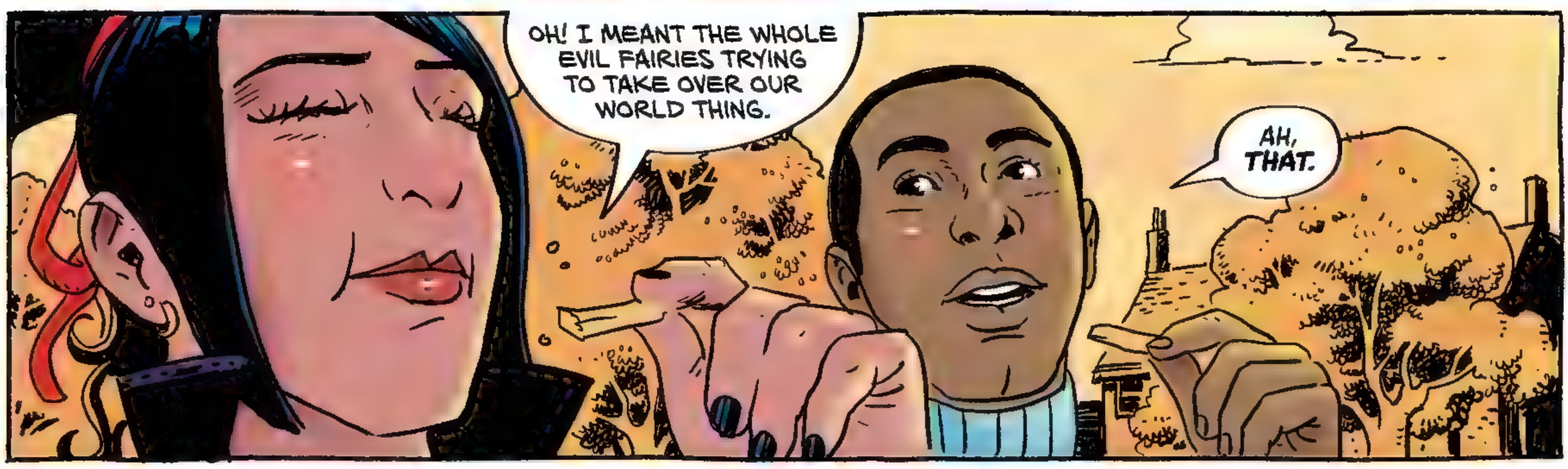

NO MATTER. THE DAYS OF SUBTERFUGE ARE NEARLY OVER. NOW COMES THE TIME OF THE STEEL, AND THE BONE...

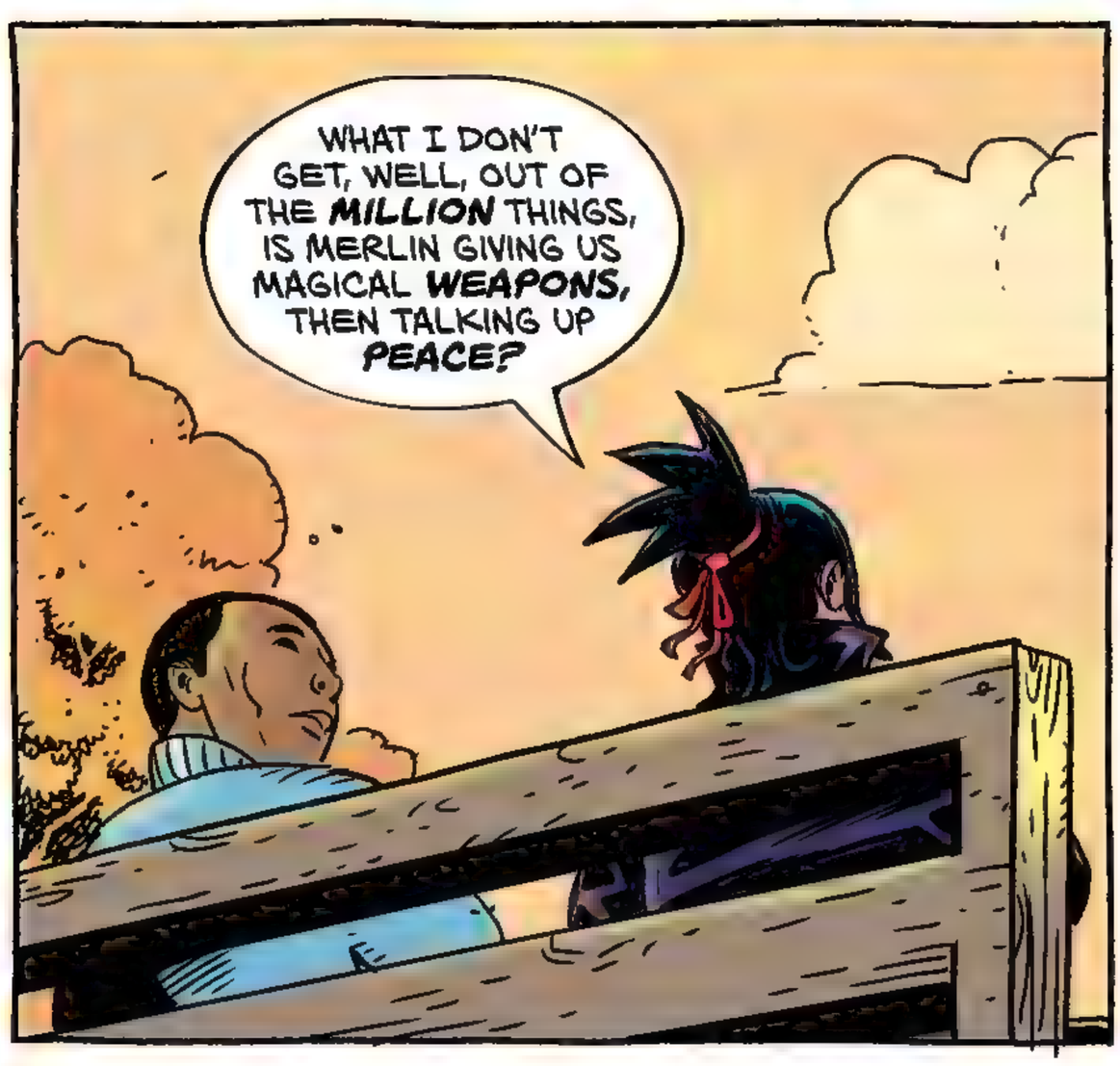
...AND THE BLOOD.

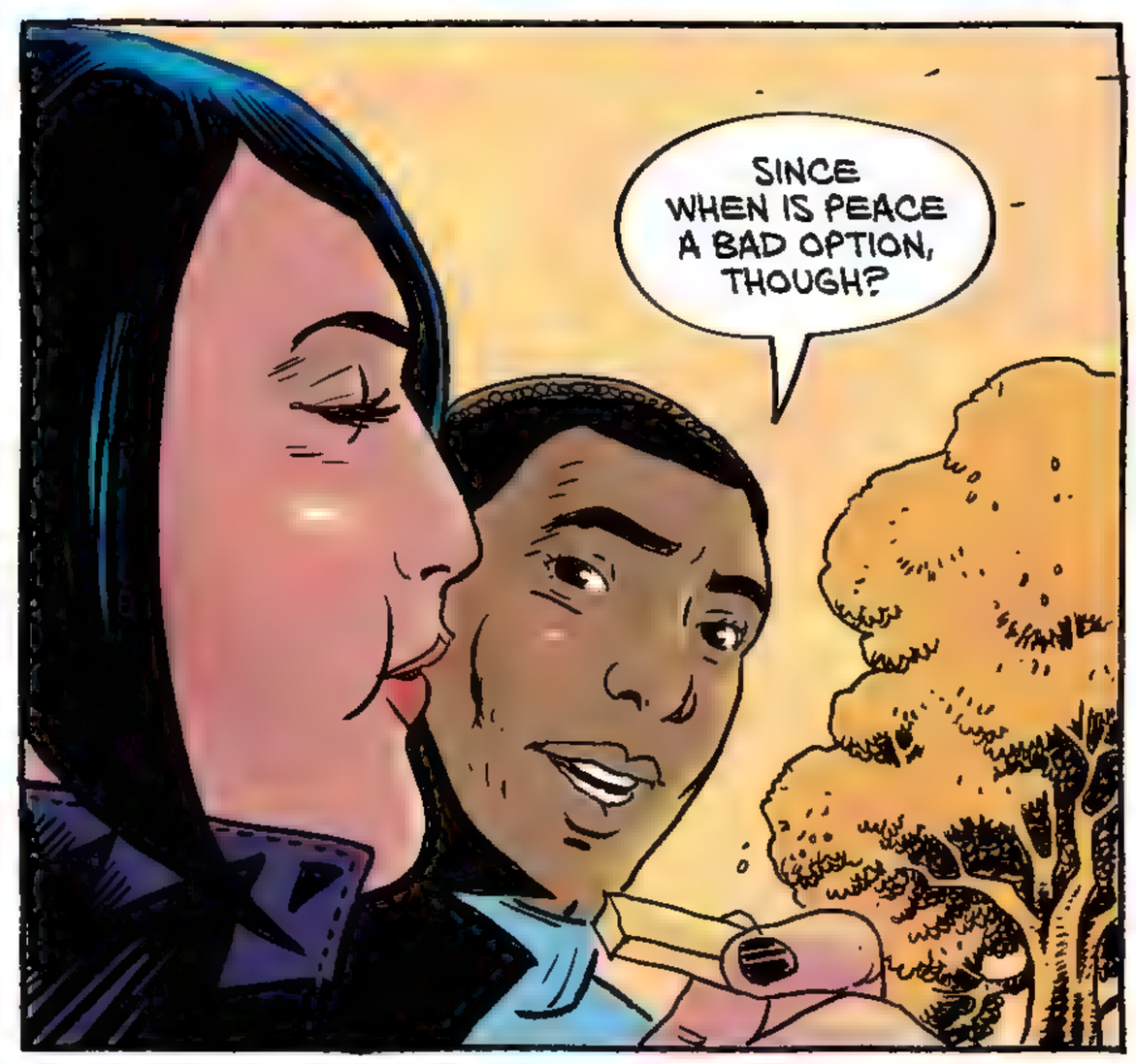
I KNOW IT'S NOT FANCY, BUT...
HEY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO IMPRESS ME. I'M TAKING YOU OUT ANYWAY, RIGHT?

FEELS A LOT LIKE PORTLAND, DOESN'T IT?

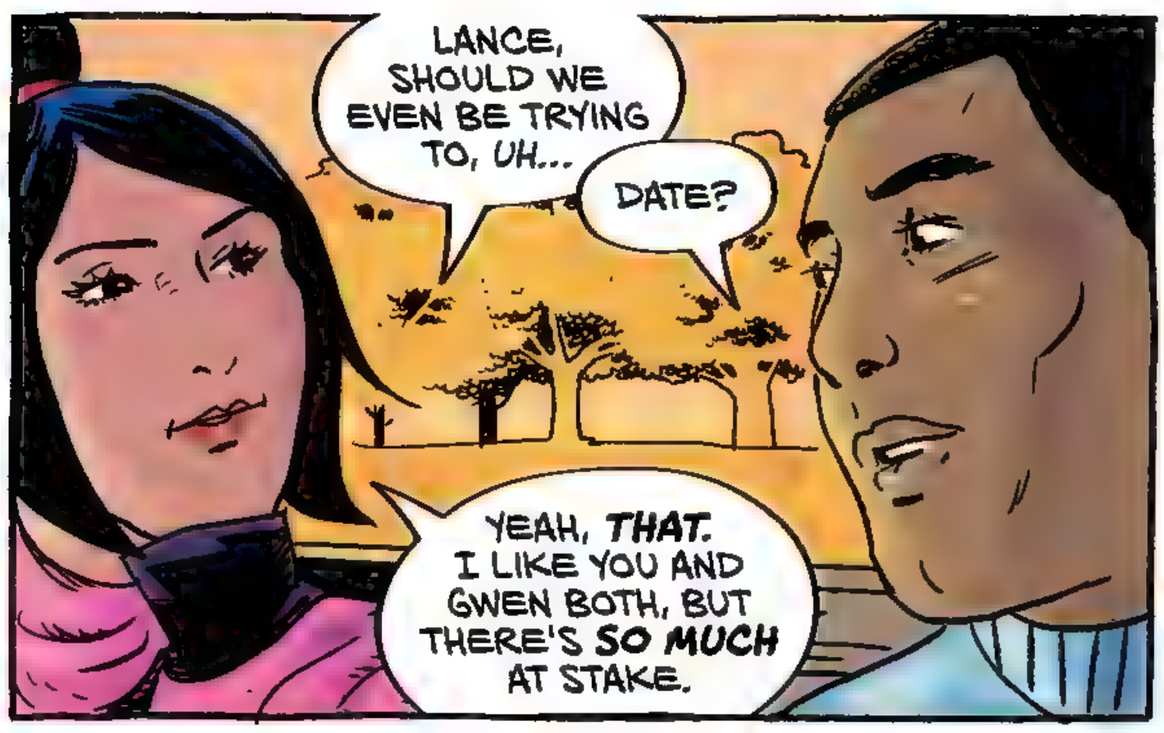
BUT IT'S ALL SO... WHO'D THINK, I MEAN WHO COULD HAVE GUESSED WE'D END UP HERE?
HAH, YEAH. YOU ALWAYS SEEMED SO... UNAPPROACHABLE IN SCHOOL.

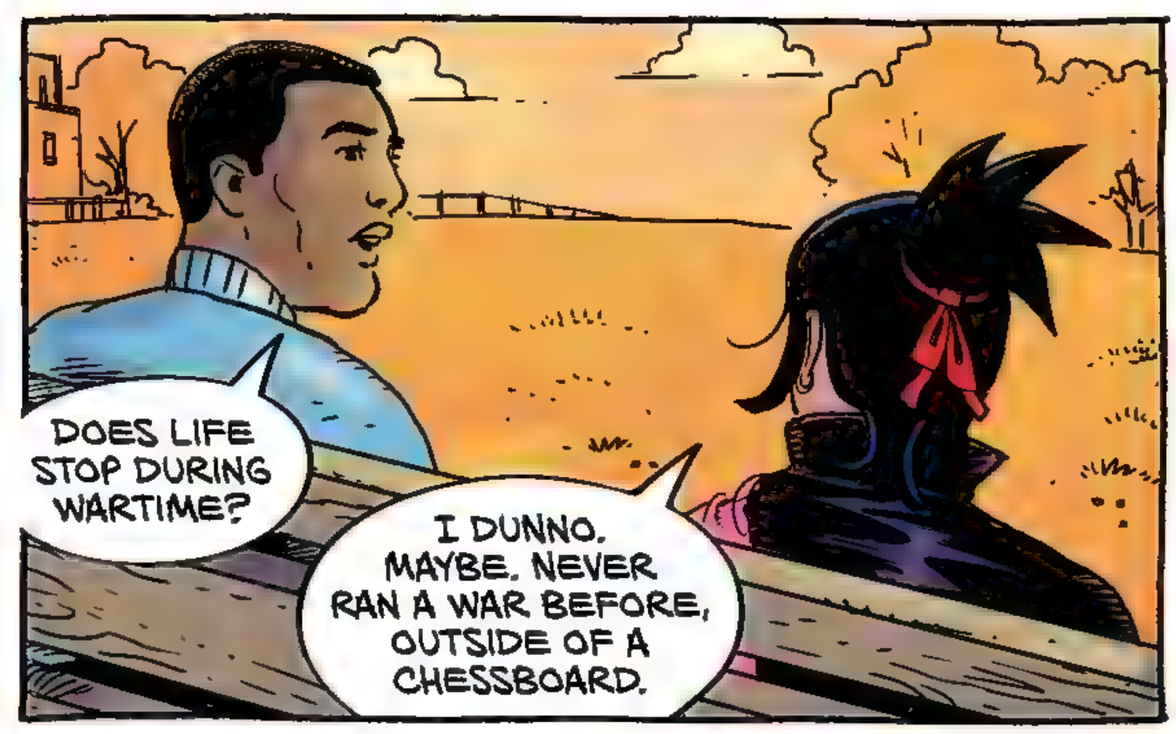

OH! I MEANT THE WHOLE EVIL FAIRIES TRYING TO TAKE OVER OUR WORLD THING.
AH, THAT.

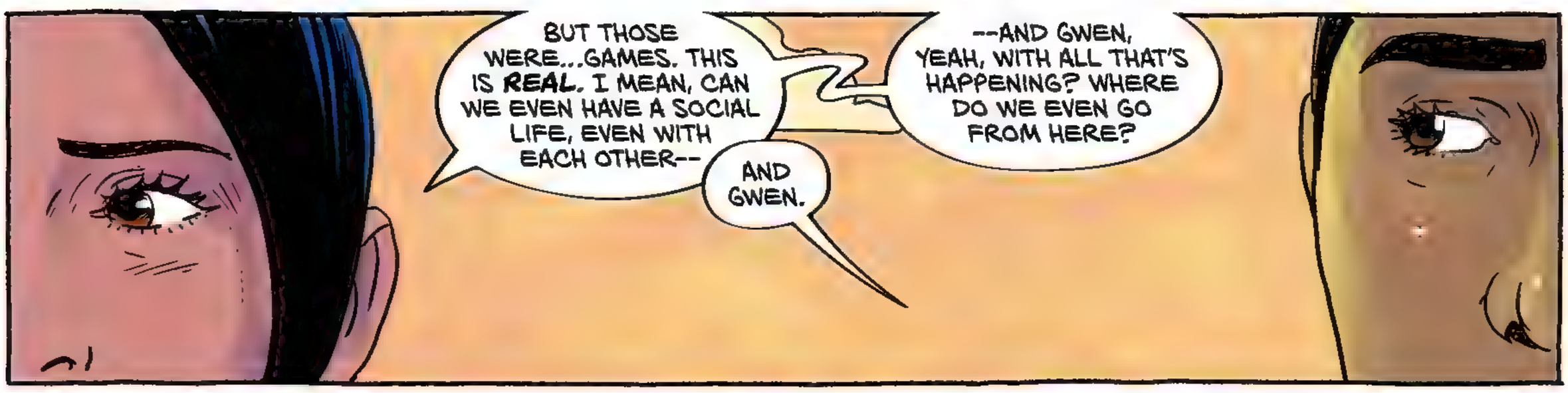

WHAT I DON'T GET, WELL, OUT OF THE MILLION THINGS, IS MERLIN GIVING US MAGICAL WEAPONS, THEN TALKING UP PEACE?


SINCE WHEN IS PEACE A BAD OPTION, THOUGH?

TRUE, BUT THE FAE DON'T SEEM LIKE THE PEACEFUL TYPE.
COULD JUST BE WHAT THEY'VE GROWN TO EXPECT. FROM US. HUMANITY, I MEAN.
=NOM NOM= POINT.
I LIKE TO MAKE THOSE ON OCCASION.
MM. PEACE IS IDEALLY THE BEST OPTION, OF COURSE.
CHIP THIEF!


LANCE, SHOULD WE EVEN BE TRYING TO, UH...
DATE?
YEAH, THAT. I LIKE YOU AND GWEN BOTH, BUT THERE'S SO MUCH AT STAKE.

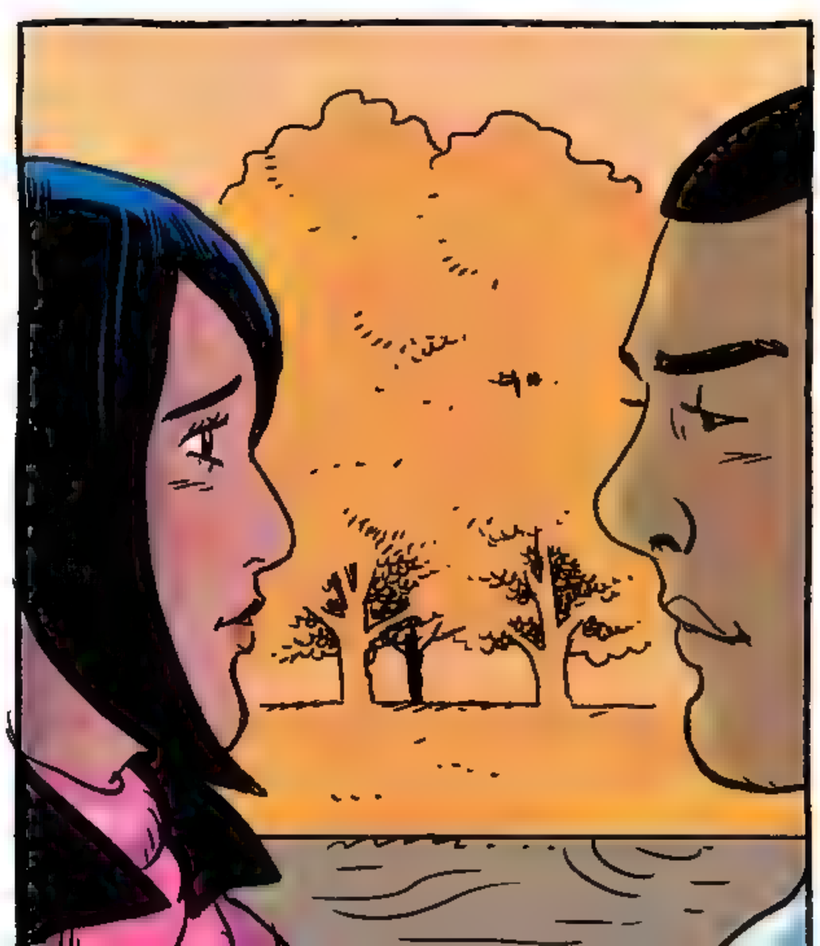

DOES LIFE STOP DURING WARTIME?
I DUNNO. MAYBE. NEVER RAN A WAR BEFORE, OUTSIDE OF A CHESSBOARD.

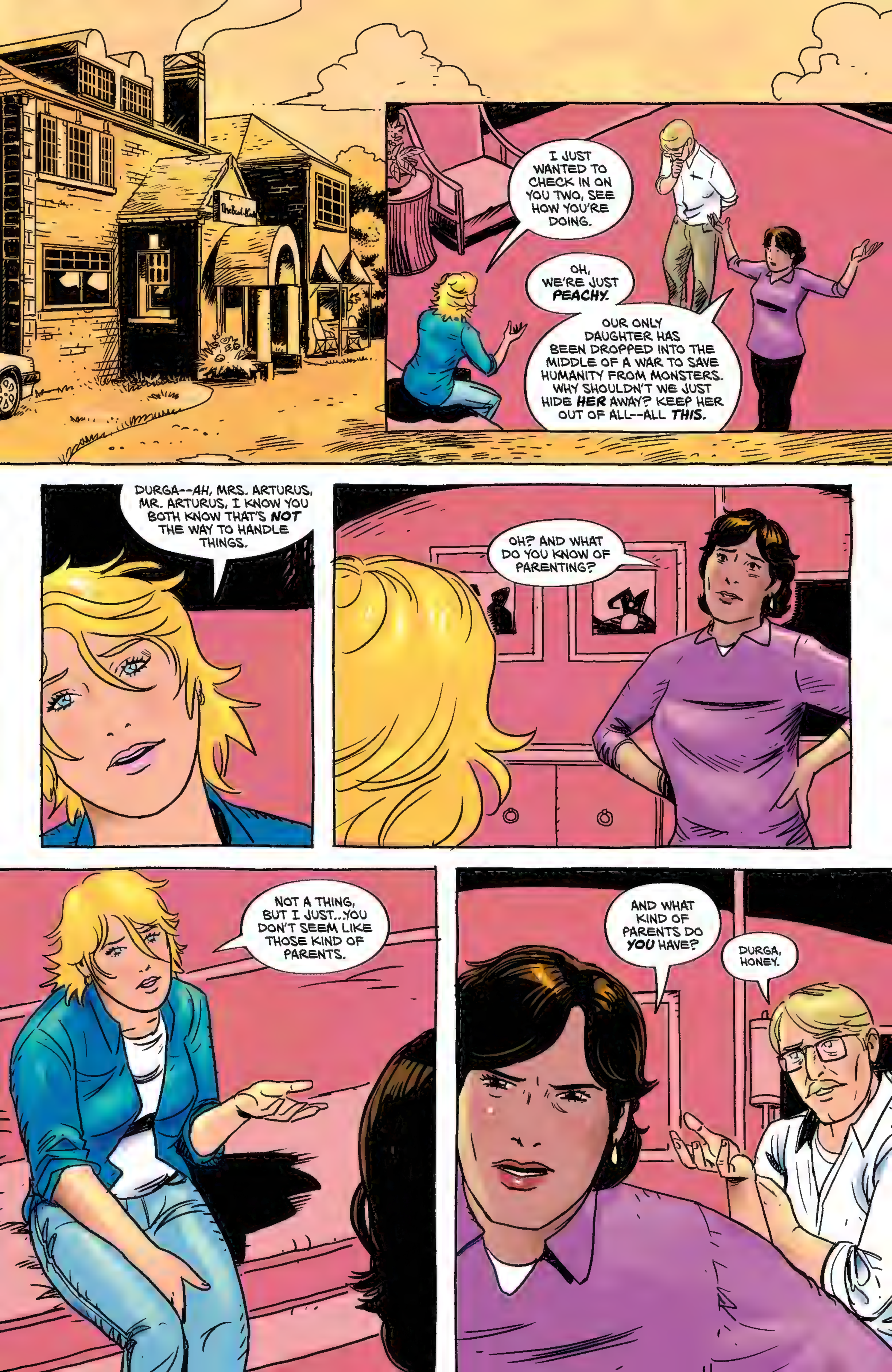

BUT THOSE WERE...GAMES. THIS IS REAL. I MEAN, CAN WE EVEN HAVE A SOCIAL LIFE, EVEN WITH EACH OTHER--
AND GWEN.
--AND GWEN, YEAH, WITH ALL THAT'S HAPPENING? WHERE DO WE EVEN GO FROM HERE?

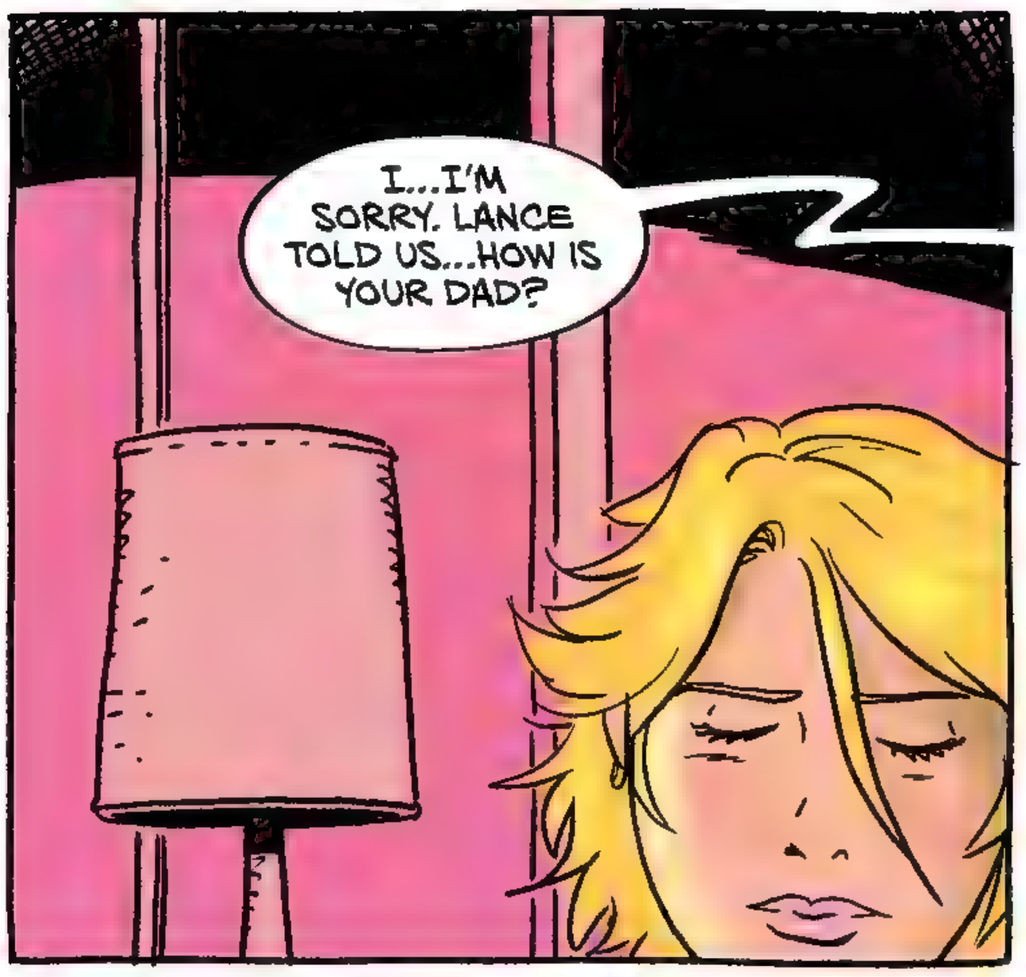
I DON'T KNOW, BUT WHAT I DO KNOW IS THAT I'VE NEVER FELT... WHATEVER THIS IS, BEFORE.
MAYBE IT'S FATE.
ME, NEITHER. IT'S ALL SO FAST. ABNORMALLY SO.

I DON'T BELIEVE IN THAT SHIT.
THIS FROM THE GIRL WHO LITERALLY PULLED THE SWORD FROM THE STONE.

I'M GOING TO KISS YOU NOW. IS THAT...DO YOU ENJOY IT?
SOMETIMES. NOW. YEAH.

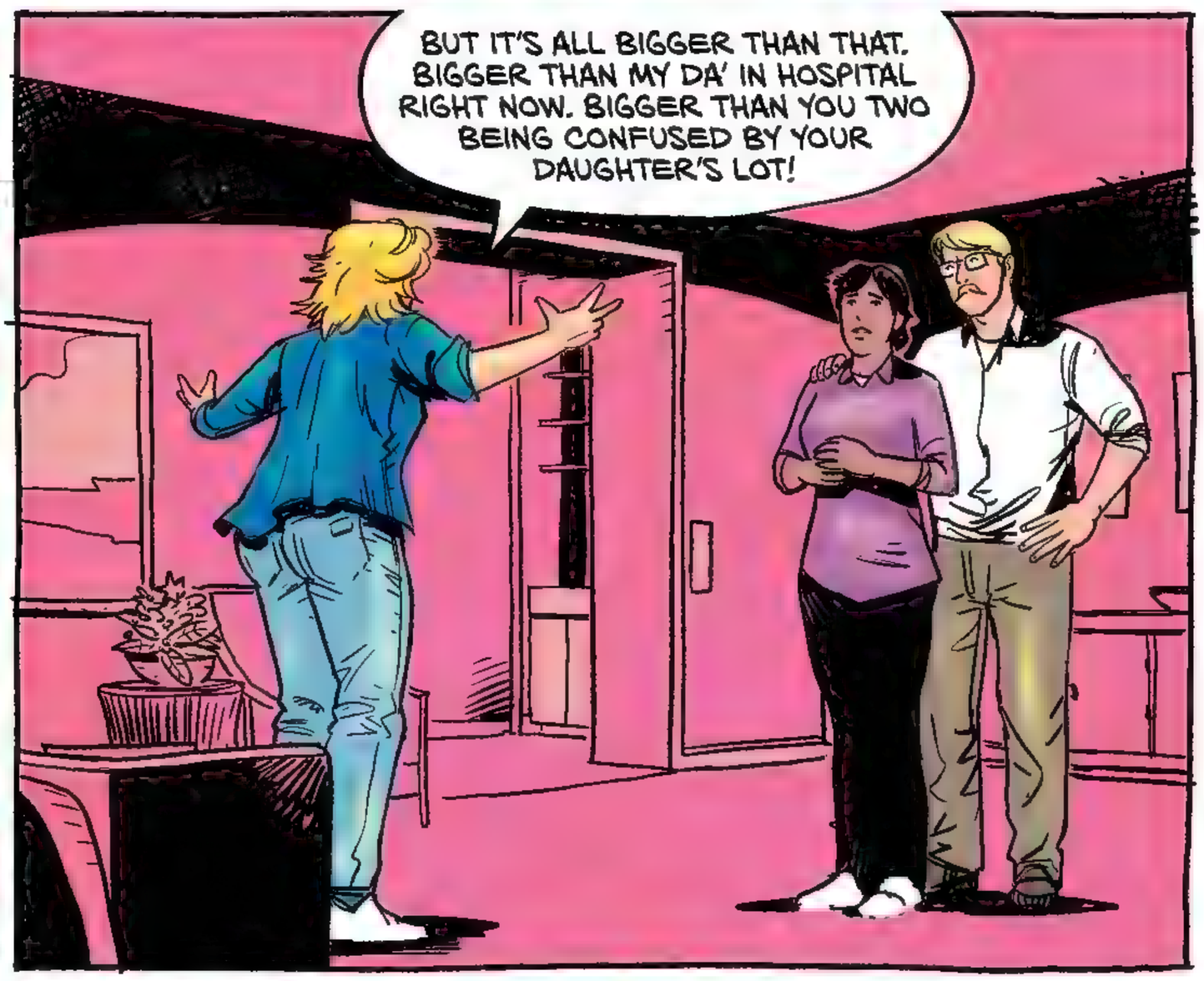



I JUST WANTED TO CHECK IN ON YOU TWO, SEE HOW YOU'RE DOING.
OH, WE'RE JUST PEACHY.
OUR ONLY DAUGHTER HAS BEEN DROPPED INTO THE MIDDLE OF A WAR TO SAVE HUMANITY FROM MONSTERS. WHY SHOULDN'T WE JUST HIDE HER AWAY? KEEP HER OUT OF ALL--ALL THIS.
DURGA--AH, MRS. ARTURUS, MR. ARTURUS, I KNOW YOU BOTH KNOW THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO HANDLE THINGS.
OH? AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF PARENTING?
NOT A THING, BUT I JUST...YOU DON'T SEEM LIKE THOSE KIND OF PARENTS.
AND WHAT KIND OF PARENTS DO YOU HAVE?
DURGA, HONEY.


I...I'M SORRY. LANCE TOLD US...HOW IS YOUR DAD?

INNOCENT! AT LEAST IN THIS FAE WAR! HE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ANY OF THIS!

AT FIRST IT WAS FUN! CUTE AMERICAN GIRL, MAGIC WEAPONS, SPACEMAN WIZARD...


BUT IT'S ALL BIGGER THAN THAT. BIGGER THAN MY DA' IN HOSPITAL RIGHT NOW. BIGGER THAN YOU TWO BEING CONFUSED BY YOUR DAUGHTER'S LOT!

BIGGER THAN US BEING TOLD WE'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WORLD.

IF YOU DON'T WANT THE WORLD--OUR WORLD--TO END, WE'VE ALL GOTTA TRUST RANI.

"BECAUSE **WAR** IS COMING..."

MY **ARMY** IS NEARLY AT THE READY.

FALL IN!

WE AWAIT YOUR COMMAND, MY **KING!**

CHAPTER FIVE

PORTLAND, OREGON, USA

WHAT AM I MISSING?

YOUR MOVES MAKE NO SENSE.

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE I CAN'T...WHAT IS IT?

RANI, YOU'VE BEEN SHUFFLING PIECES FOR HOURS.

MAYBE TIME FOR A BREAK, YEAH?

I JUST CAN'T SEE AROUND CORNERS RIGHT NOW.

SAY WHAT NOW?

MOVES AHEAD. IT'S WHAT CHESS *IS*. AND THIS, THE FAE INVASION, IS THE SAME THING.

YOU'RE RIGHT, THOUGH. I NEED TO CLEAR MY HEAD-- AND THE MORGAN PARI SIGNING IS TODAY.

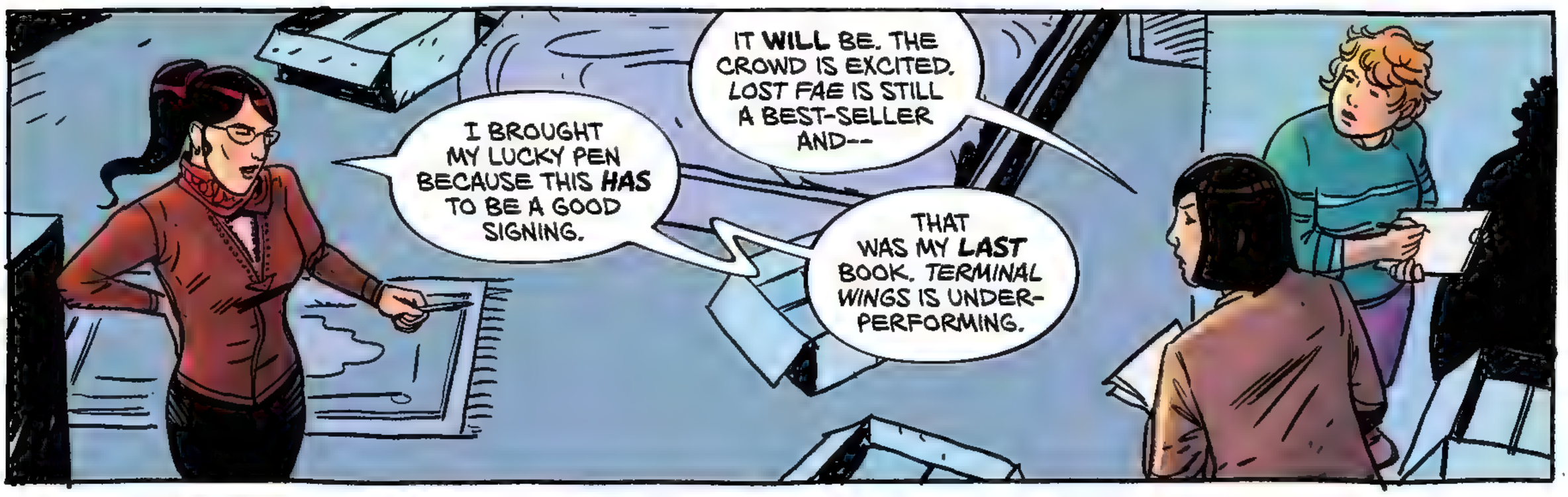
WANNA GO?

ANYTHING TO GET YOU AWAY FROM TALKING TO YOURSELF.

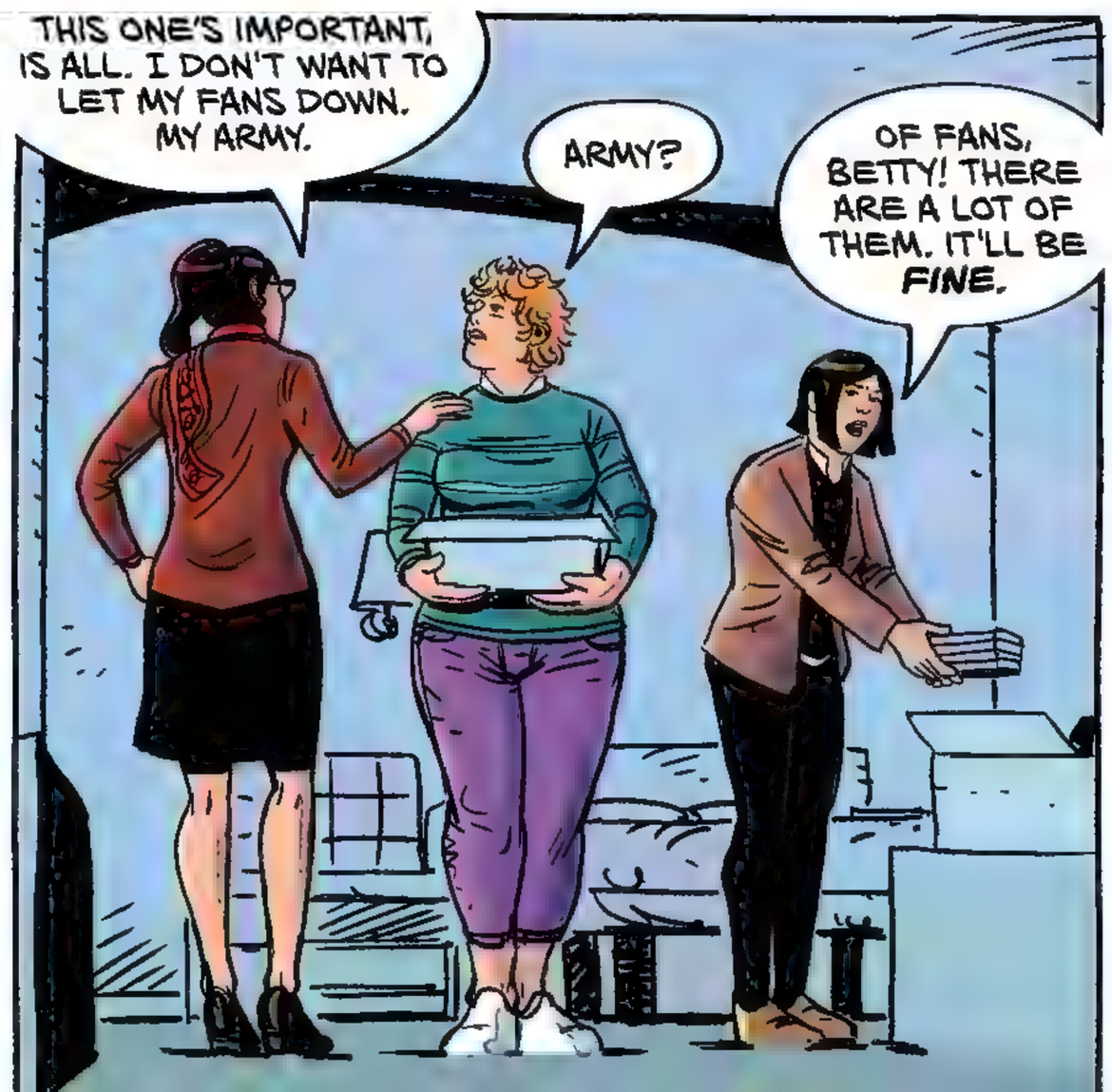
FUN!

MORGAN PARI'S HOTEL

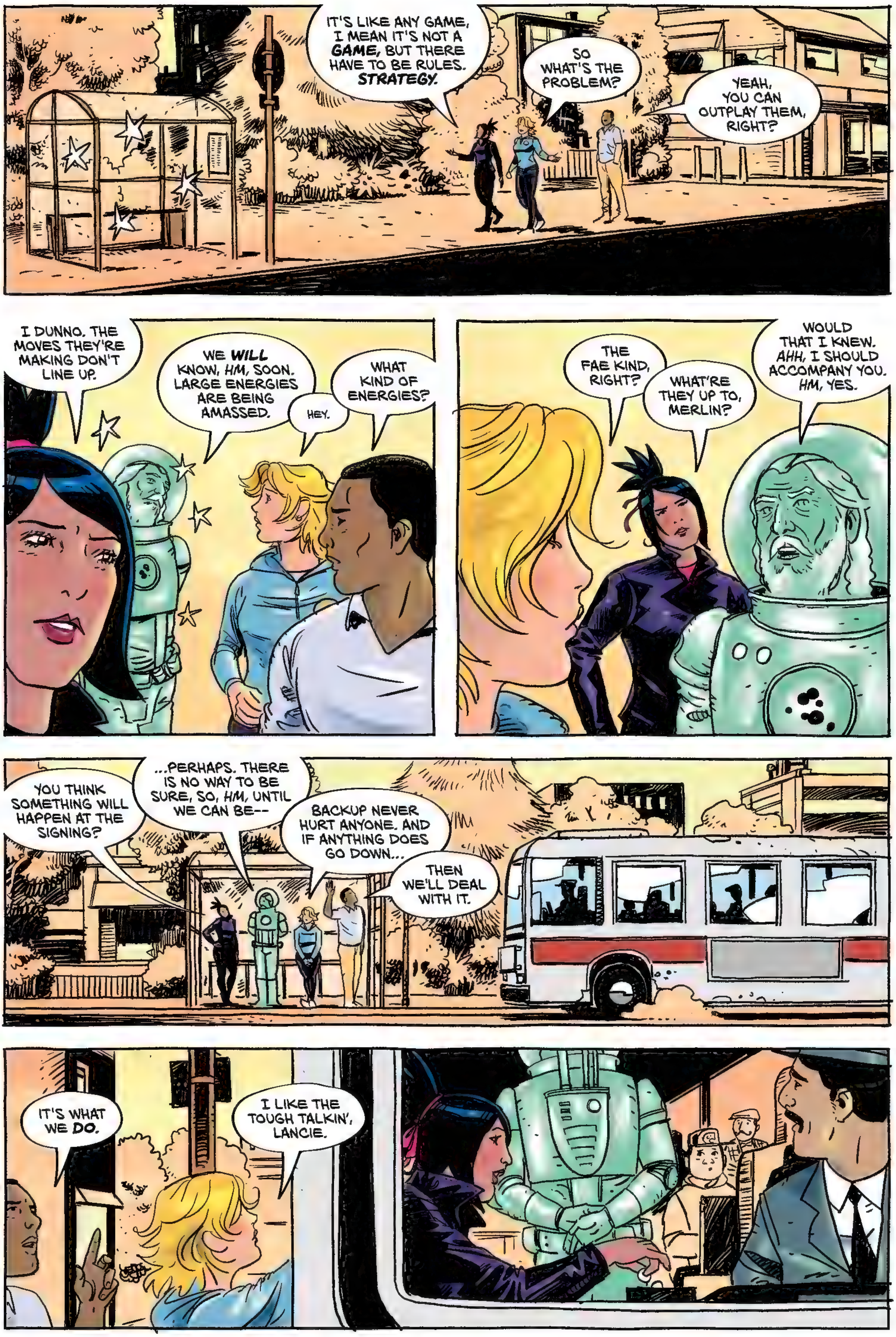
WHAT'S THIS?
PENS! FOR, UH, FOR SIGNING YOUR BOOKS?
HOOBOY...


I BROUGHT MY LUCKY PEN BECAUSE THIS HAS TO BE A GOOD SIGNING.
IT WILL BE. THE CROWD IS EXCITED. LOST FAE IS STILL A BEST-SELLER AND--
THAT WAS MY LAST BOOK. TERMINAL WINGS IS UNDER-PERFORMING.

IT'S DOING FINE, MORGAN, JUST A DENSER READ.
YOU'VE DONE THIS A THOUSAND TIMES. WHY ARE YOU STRESSING?


THIS ONE'S IMPORTANT, IS ALL. I DON'T WANT TO LET MY FANS DOWN. MY ARMY.
ARMY?
OF FANS, BETTY! THERE ARE A LOT OF THEM. IT'LL BE FINE.

FAE
BLOOD AND BONES SHALL POWER US!
THIS BONE GATEWAY WILL TAKE YOU TO KILL THE USURPER!
DEATH TO THOSE WHO OPPOSE US!
DOOM TO 'EM!
A FEAST!
THE DEATHSINGER SPOKE TO ME, MY WARRIORS--
--AND WE SHALL BE VICTORIOUS!
MANY OF YOU WILL ARRIVE WHOLE AND PROUD, MY CHOSEN TO DESTROY ALL OPPOSITION!
DID HE SAY "MANY"? NOT, AH, "ALL"...?


IT'S LIKE ANY GAME, I MEAN IT'S NOT A GAME, BUT THERE HAVE TO BE RULES. STRATEGY.
SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
YEAH, YOU CAN OUTPLAY THEM, RIGHT?
I DUNNO. THE MOVES THEY'RE MAKING DON'T LINE UP.
WE WILL KNOW, HM, SOON. LARGE ENERGIES ARE BEING AMASSED.
HEY.
WHAT KIND OF ENERGIES?
THE FAE KIND, RIGHT?
WHAT'RE THEY UP TO, MERLIN?
WOULD THAT I KNEW. AHH, I SHOULD ACCOMPANY YOU. HM, YES.
YOU THINK SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN AT THE SIGNING?
...PERHAPS. THERE IS NO WAY TO BE SURE, SO, HM, UNTIL WE CAN BE--
BACKUP NEVER HURT ANYONE. AND IF ANYTHING DOES GO DOWN...
THEN WE'LL DEAL WITH IT.
IT'S WHAT WE DO.
I LIKE THE TOUGH TALKIN', LANCIE.

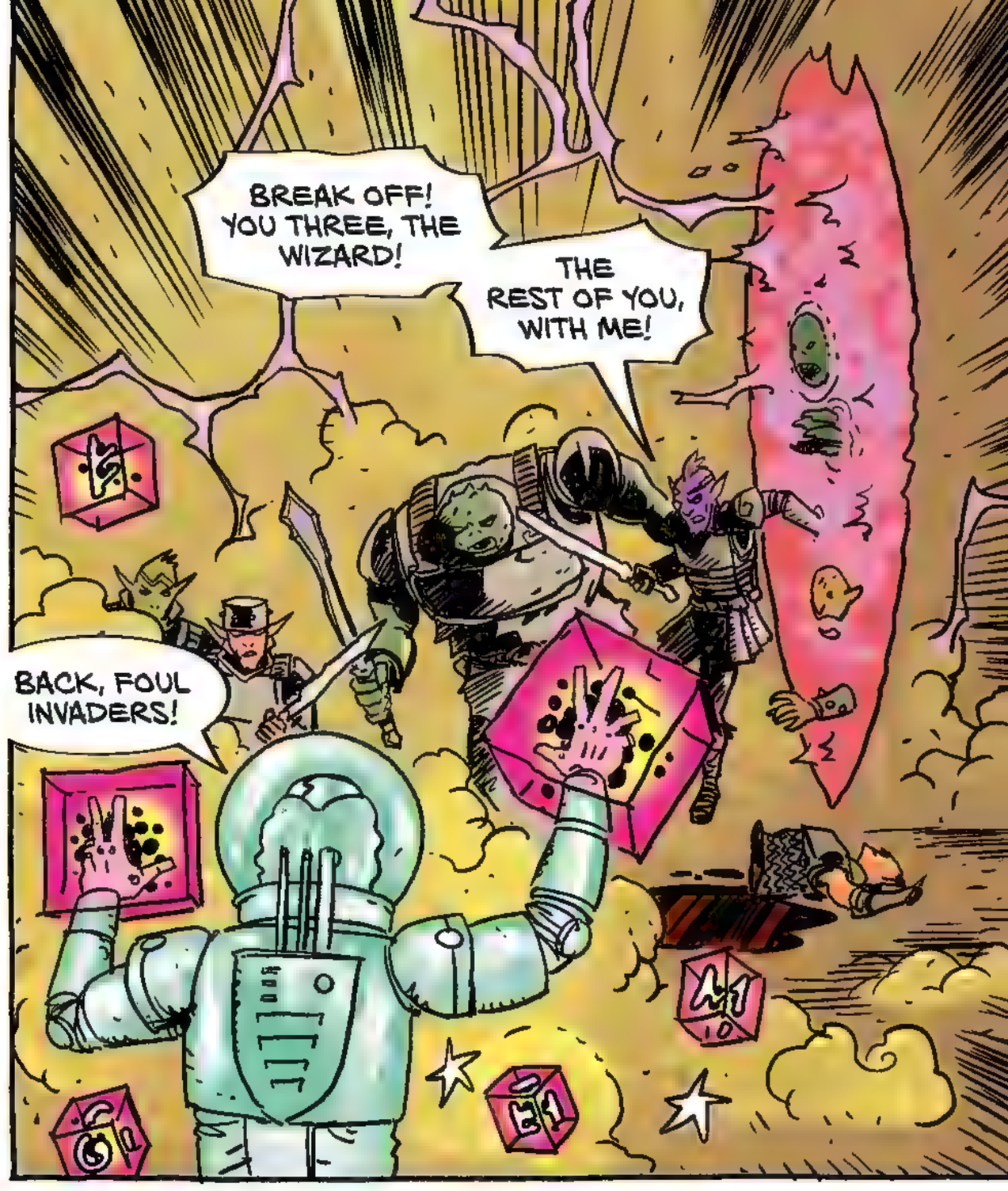
BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS
USED
BOOKS

HERE YOU GO, MS. PARI.
AH, GOOD. I'M FAMISHED.

HOW DO YOU EAT LIKE THIS AND STAY SO FIT?
GENETICS, I SUPPOSE.

WHEW, JUST MADE IT!
I COULD STAY IN HERE ALL DAY.

GO FORTH!
FOR THE NIGHT ETERNAL!
FOR THE SHARP BONE!



OH, REALLY? THEY'RE HERE?
ALL YOUR PORTLAND FANS ARE HERE.
HRM.
IS SHE LOOKIN' RIGHT AT US?
YEAH...
MAYBE SHE REMEMBERS US FROM THE RESTAURANT?
OR SHE FANCIES LANCE HERE.
SHHH, SHE'S SPEAKING.
WAIT, YA' THINK?
CLAP CLAP
WELCOME! THANK YOU!
AS YOU KNOW, THE NEWEST BOOK EXPLORES THE DANGER OF FAE AND THEIR RIGHTFUL ASSUMPTION OF POWER HERE ON EARTH.
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

KLAK KLAK
WHAT'S GOING ON BACK THERE?
SOMETHING MORE EXCITING THAN HERE, SOUNDS LIKE.
AH!
W-WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS?!
WHAT THE--
MAH, MAH BLOOD...
HELP!
CALL 911!
THE KING MOVES, EH?
SHIT, HERE? NOW? WE HAVE TO PROTECT THESE PEOPLE!

TIME TO PLAY MY ROLE.
UHM, HELP!
QUICK, BETTY! CALL THE COPS!
WE NEED TO END THIS.
AYE!
ALL THESE INNOCENT PEOPLE... MY GOD.
ARE THEY GOING FOR HER? WHY?
GWEN, LANCE-- YOU'RE ON CROWD DUTY!

I'M GOING TO GET BETWEEN THE FAE AND MS. PARI!
I'LL HOLD THESE TWO OFF. CLEAR THE DOOR, YEAH?
LISTEN UP, FOLKS! I'LL OPEN A PATH FOR YOU TO ESCAPE!
RUN!
LET'S DANCE, YA' GRUESOME TWOSOME!
SPLECH

THE CARNAGE, SO MUCH DEATH... SEEMS UNREAL.
BUT IT'S NOT. I NEED TO FOCUS.
LIKE GWEN AND LANCE... THEY JUST DIVE IN ON INSTINCT.
I'M DAMN LUCKY.
GET OUTSIDE NOW!
GO, GO, GO!
MS. PARI! THEY'RE AFTER YOU!
OH, MY SWEET PUTRID HELLS...
SLICE

MY HERO.
RUN, MS. PARI!
EVERYONE MOVE! THE CEILING'S CAVING IN!
GET BACK HERE, YE COWARDS!
RANI'S RIGHT. THEY JUST KEEP GOIN' AFTER HER...
THOSE POOR PEOPLE...
THE FAE AREN'T INTERESTED IN US.
LAST MISTAKE THEY'LL EVER MAKE!

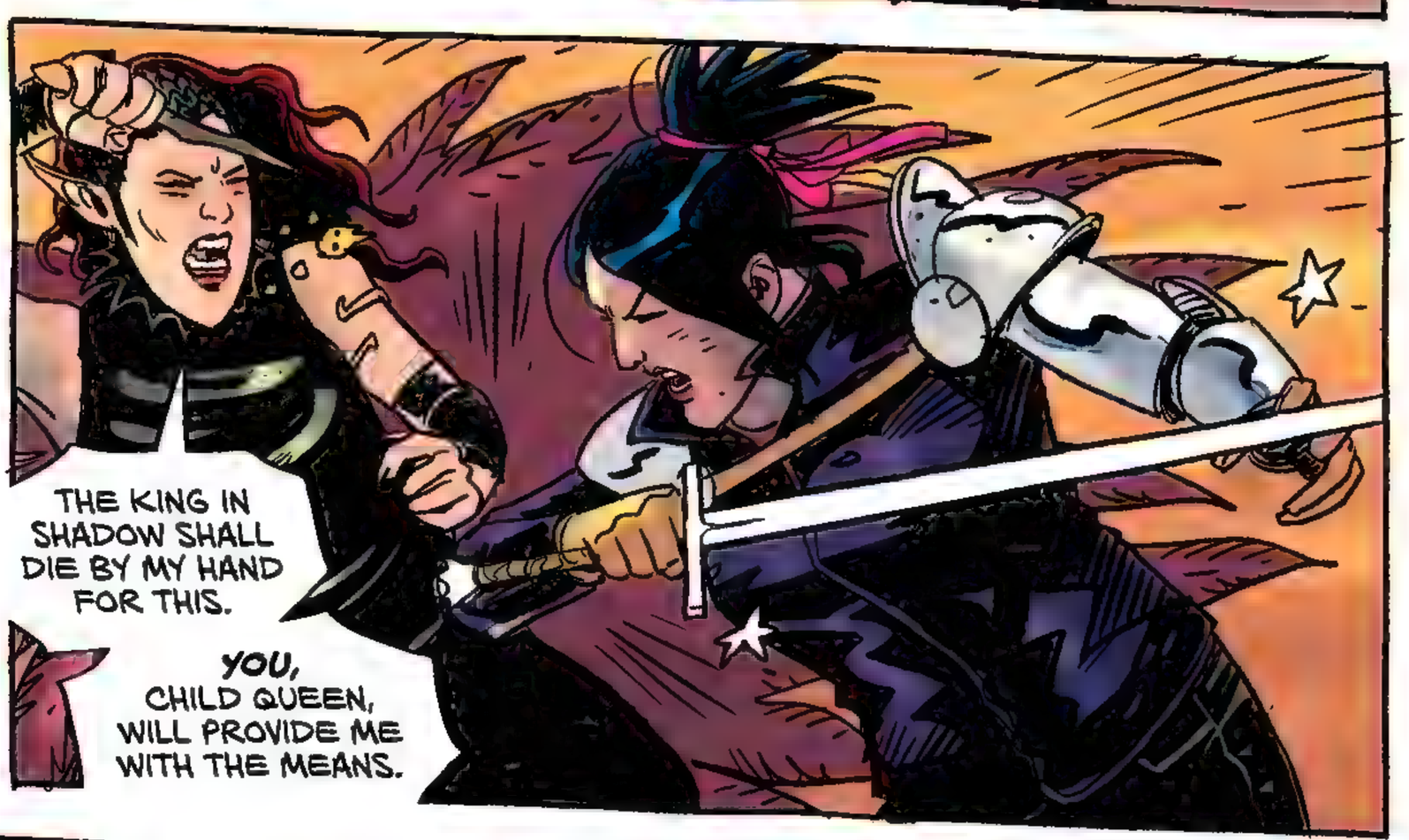
I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY'RE AFTER YOU, BUT YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE...!
WE'RE BEYOND OUTNUMBERED!
WHERE THE HELL IS MERLIN?!
HA! BRING IT!
SCUMCHILD!
EH?

EYE FER AN EYE!
AAAGH!
GWEN!
I'M COMING, GWEN!
NOT SO FAST, CHILD QUEEN.
WHO--?
YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE YOUR DEAR MORGAN PARI?

YOU...?
PART OF ME HOPED YOU WERE HERE FOR ME, BUT I OVERESTIMATED YOU.

YOU'RE THE MISSING PLAYER?!

NOW I CAN SEE THE BOARD CLEARLY!
KICK


THE KING IN SHADOW SHALL DIE BY MY HAND FOR THIS.
YOU, CHILD QUEEN, WILL PROVIDE ME WITH THE MEANS.

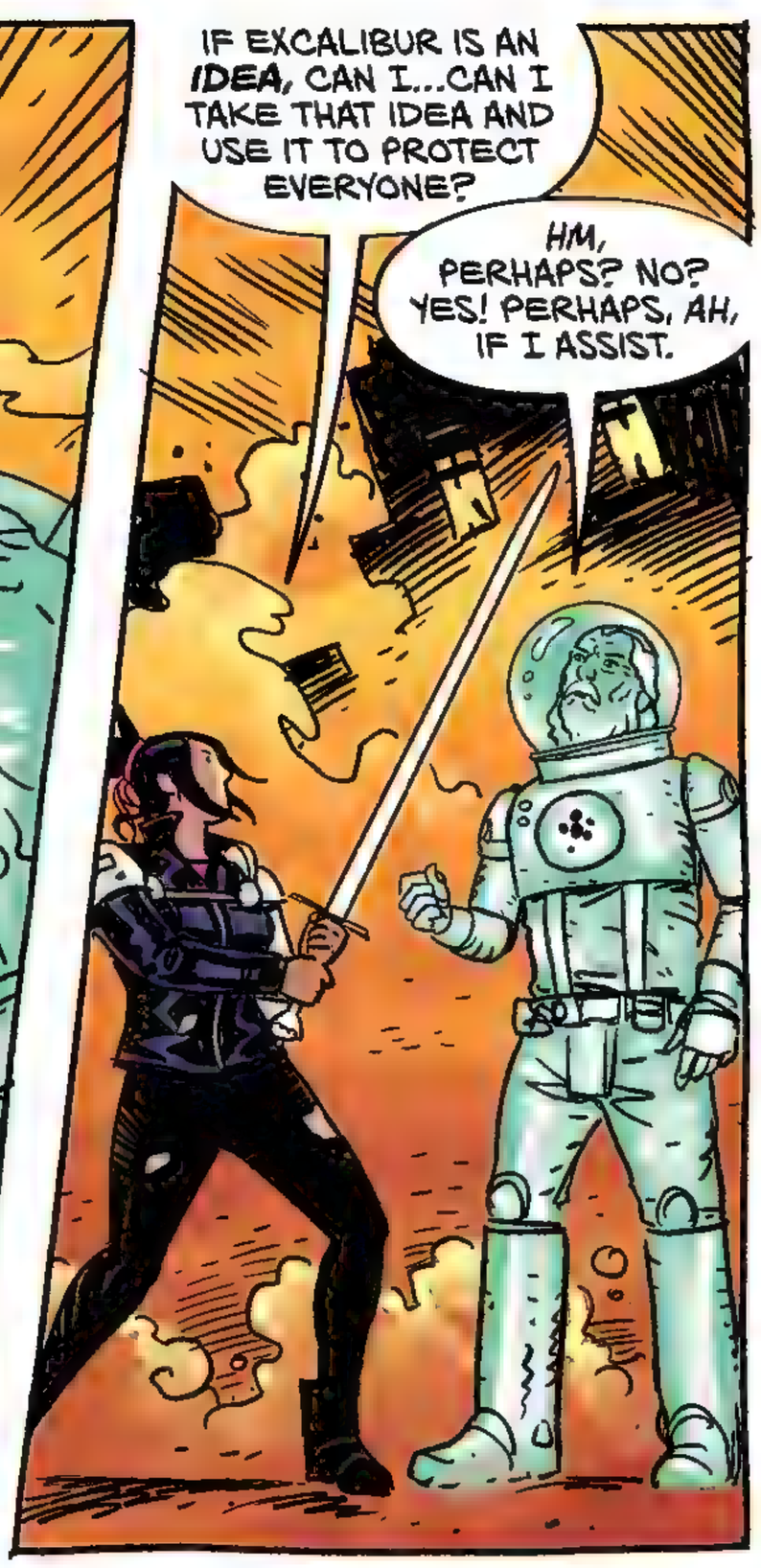
YOU AND YOUR KIND SHALL ALL KNEEL BEFORE ME!
I LOVE YOUR BOOKS, MS. PARI, BUT WRITERS' EGOS ARE THE WORST!

IF'N YOU WON'T YIELD...
...DIE!

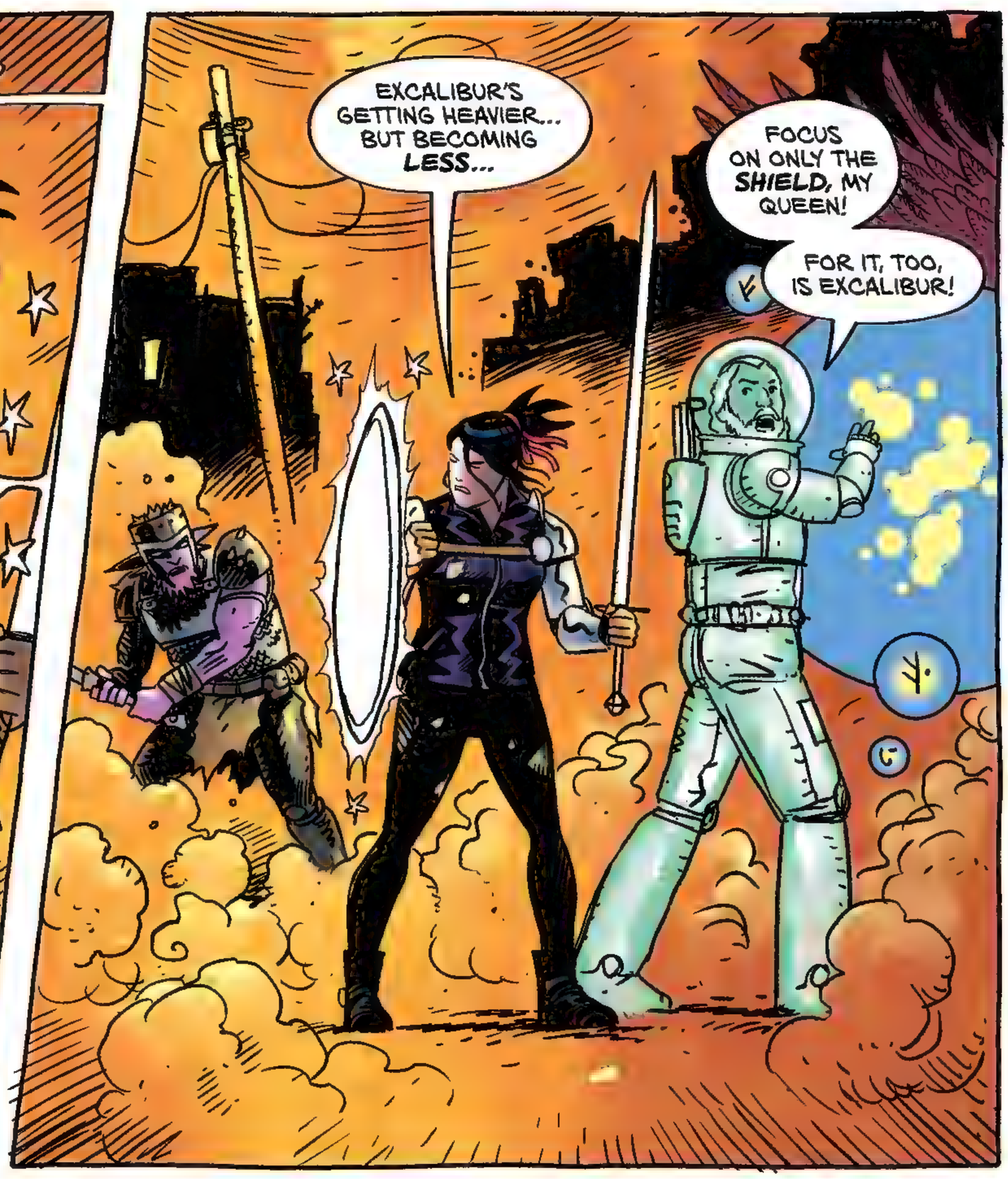
MORGANA. AH, OF COURSE.
WIZARD. YOUR TIME DRAWS NEAR.
ALWAYS, BUT NOT TODAY.

TOO MANY INNOCENT BY-STANDERS ARE DYING--HAVE DIED.
I AGREE, BUT, HMM...

WE NEED TO PROTECT, NOT FIGHT.
DEFENSE, AH, YES. GO ON...


IF EXCALIBUR IS AN IDEA, CAN I...CAN I TAKE THAT IDEA AND USE IT TO PROTECT EVERYONE?
HM, PERHAPS? NO? YES! PERHAPS, AH, IF I ASSIST.

THINK OF WHAT YOU NEED, RANI.


EXCALIBUR'S GETTING HEAVIER... BUT BECOMING LESS...
FOCUS ON ONLY THE SHIELD, MY QUEEN!
FOR IT, TOO, IS EXCALIBUR!

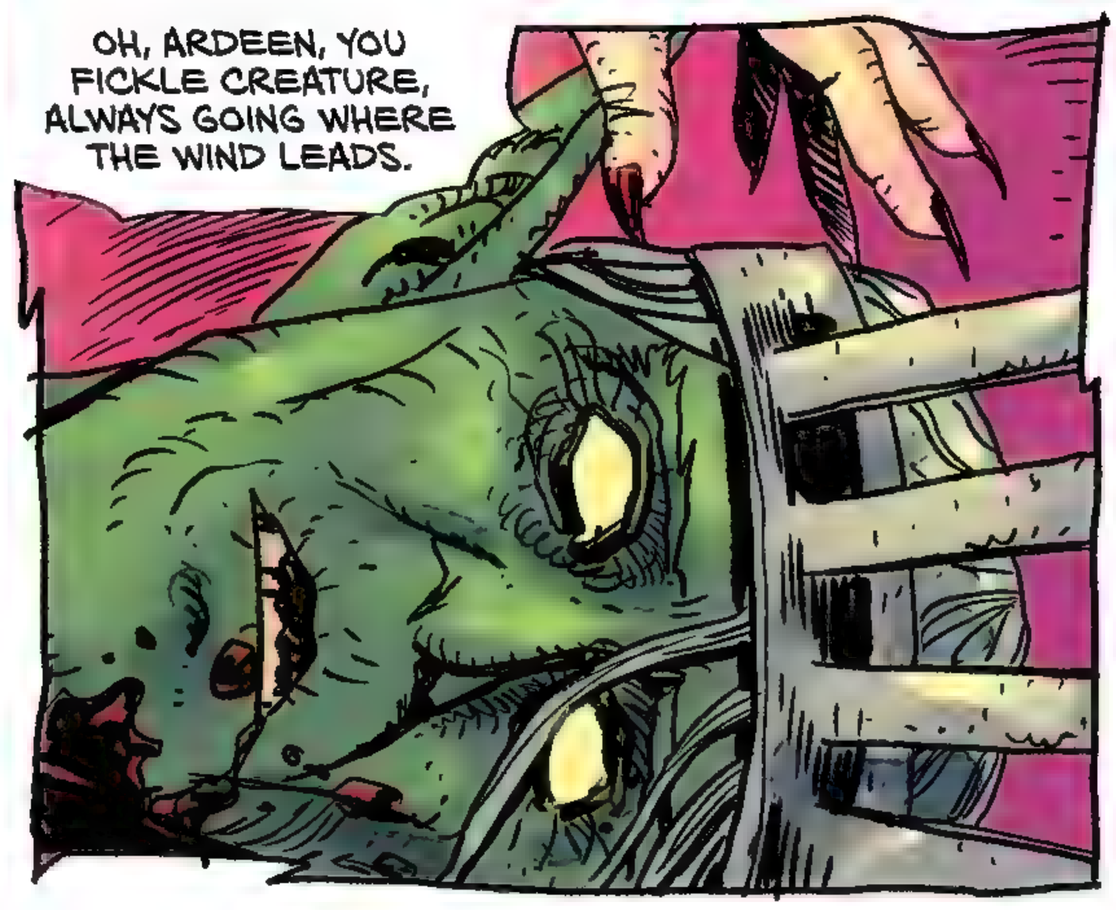
NO! NO, DAMN YOU!
BACK, FOUL WITCH!
I...I THINK... IT'S WORKING. CAN YOU GIVE ME MORE POWER, MERLIN?
HM, YES, BUT MY OTHER SPELLS WILL HAVE TO BE CANCELLED. YOU WILL BE REVEALED TO THE WORLD.
THERE WON'T BE A WORLD IF YOU DON'T DO IT!
WE NEED TO GET THE FAE OUT OF HERE BEFORE THIS IS FINISHED!
INDEED! BACK INTO THE BREACH, INVADERS! YOUR QUEEN COMMANDS YOU!
SHE'S NOT MY QUEEN, OLD MAN!

NO! BACK! AWAY FROM ME, YOU FOOLS!
THROUGH THE PORTAL WITH YE, BETRAYER!
AAAAH!
THE KING, HE WILL DECIDE YOUR FATE, MORGANA!
I'LL BE BACK FOR YOUR FLESH AND BONE, QUEENLING!
IS IT DONE? DID IT WORK?
HMMM, YES. EXCALIBUR IS LESSENED, JUST A BLADE...
...BUT FAE IS LOCKED AWAY ONCE MORE.
GWEN! GWEN!
WE NEED TO GET HER TO A HOSPITAL.
D-DID WE WIN, LOVE?
THEY'RE... THEY'RE GONE.

"IT'S OVER."
OH, MIGHTY KING IN SHADOW! OH, FEARFUL LIEGE! OH, USELESS FOOL!
MORGANA! YOU DARE PLOT AGAINST ME?
THE LADY ALWAYS PLANS, SIRE. DID YOU THINK I WOULD NEVER RID MYSELF OF YOU?
I KNEW YOU'D TRY, YOU SCHEMING BITCH! NOW, IN DEFEAT, BOW BEFORE YOUR KING!
MY KING.
LONG MAY YOU REIGN...
...IN HELL.
ACK!
PREPARE THE PLACE FOR ME, WILL YOU?

WHO ELSE DENIES MY RULE?

NONE. BUT WE ARE LOCKED OUT OF THE HUMAN WORLD, MY...QUEEN IN SHADOW!



I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO EAT THE HOOMANS?

MORGANA-- QUEEN MORGANA WILL SEE TO IT. ER, I THINK.

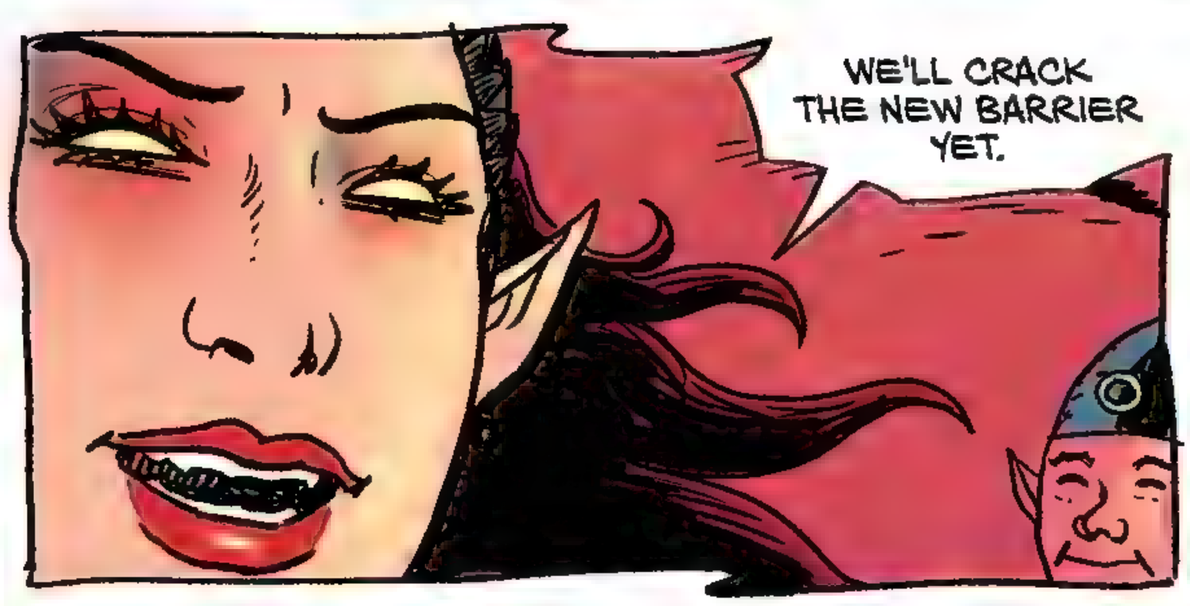
I HATE POLITICS.

...AND LATER
WILL IT HOLD?
THE KING IN SHADOW WILL PROVE MORE EFFECTIVE NOW THAN EVER BEFORE.

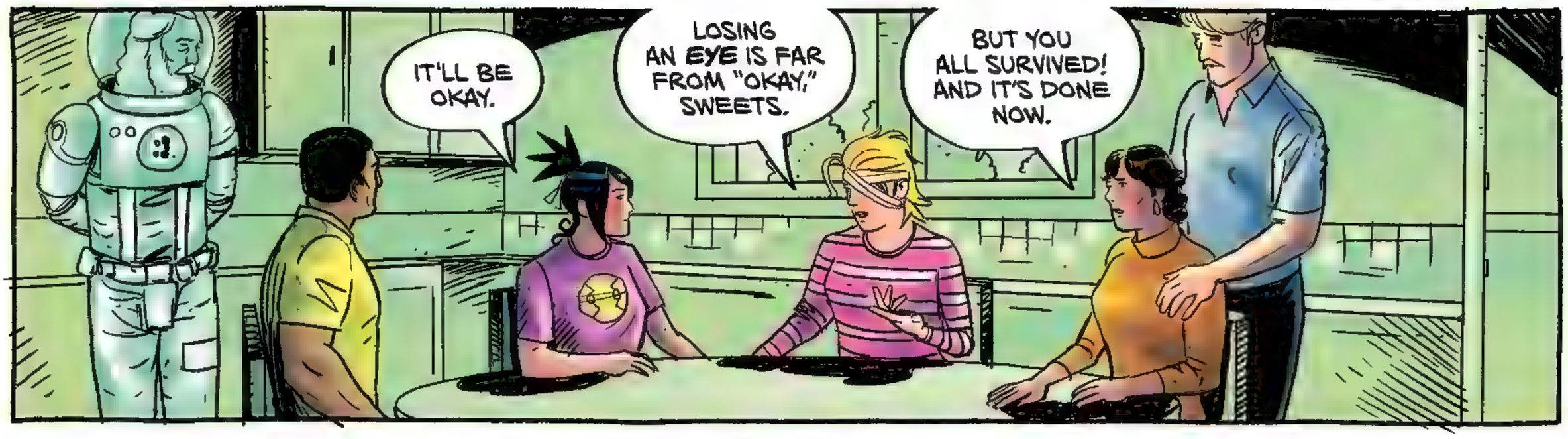
HIS BONES, TOOLS FUSED WITH MY MAGIC, WILL FREE US.

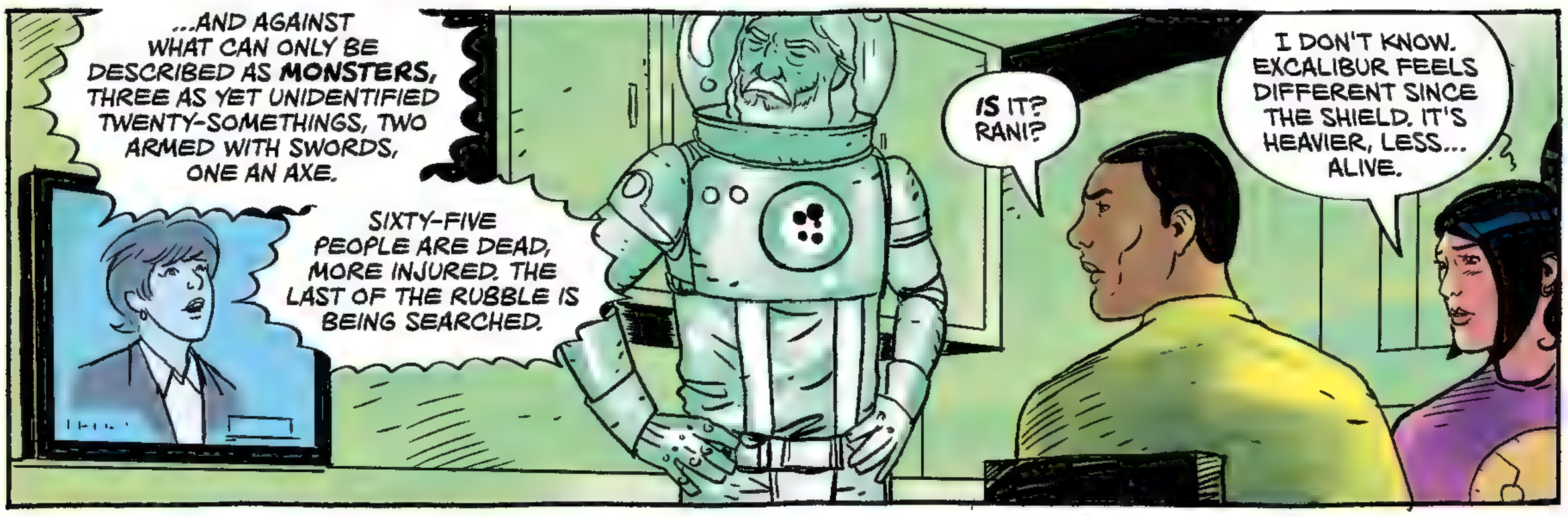
KER-RAKK

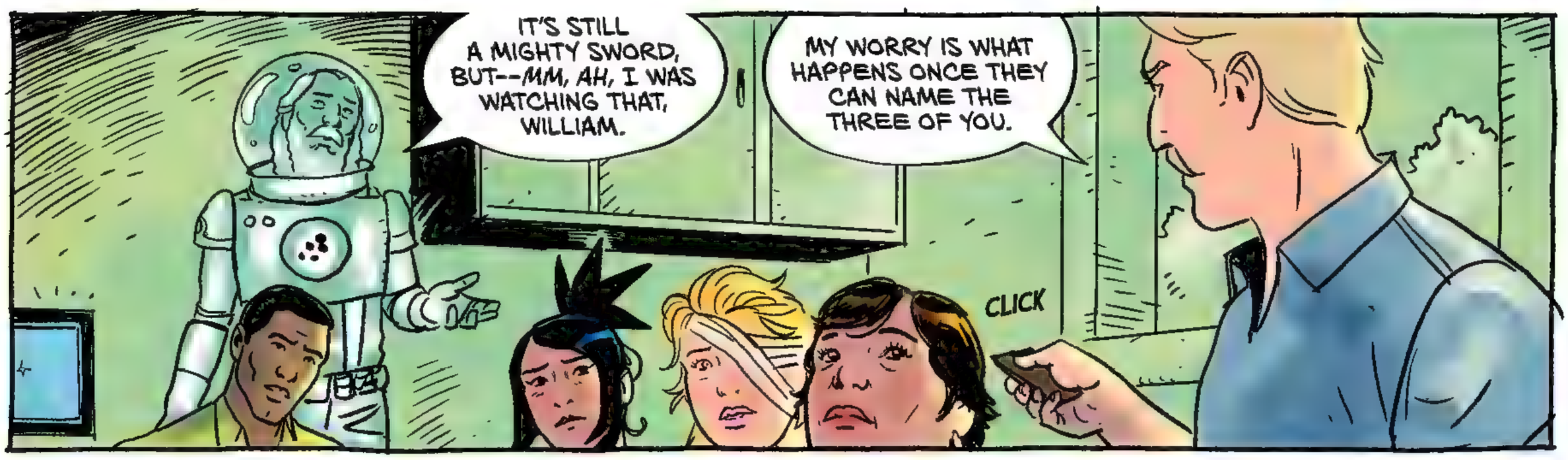
YES, THIS WILL DO.


WE'LL CRACK THE NEW BARRIER YET.

I HAVE DEADLINES TO KEEP...


IT'LL BE OKAY.
LOSING AN EYE IS FAR FROM "OKAY," SWEETS.
BUT YOU ALL SURVIVED! AND IT'S DONE NOW.


...AND AGAINST WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS MONSTERS, THREE AS YET UNIDENTIFIED TWENTY-SOMETHINGS, TWO ARMED WITH SWORDS, ONE AN AXE.
SIXTY-FIVE PEOPLE ARE DEAD, MORE INJURED. THE LAST OF THE RUBBLE IS BEING SEARCHED.
IS IT? RANI?
I DON'T KNOW. EXCALIBUR FEELS DIFFERENT SINCE THE SHIELD. IT'S HEAVIER, LESS... ALIVE.


IT'S STILL A MIGHTY SWORD, BUT--MM, AH, I WAS WATCHING THAT, WILLIAM.
MY WORRY IS WHAT HAPPENS ONCE THEY CAN NAME THE THREE OF YOU.
CLICK

LOOK, EVEN IF WE DON'T LIKE ANY OF THIS, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.
ALL OF YOU.

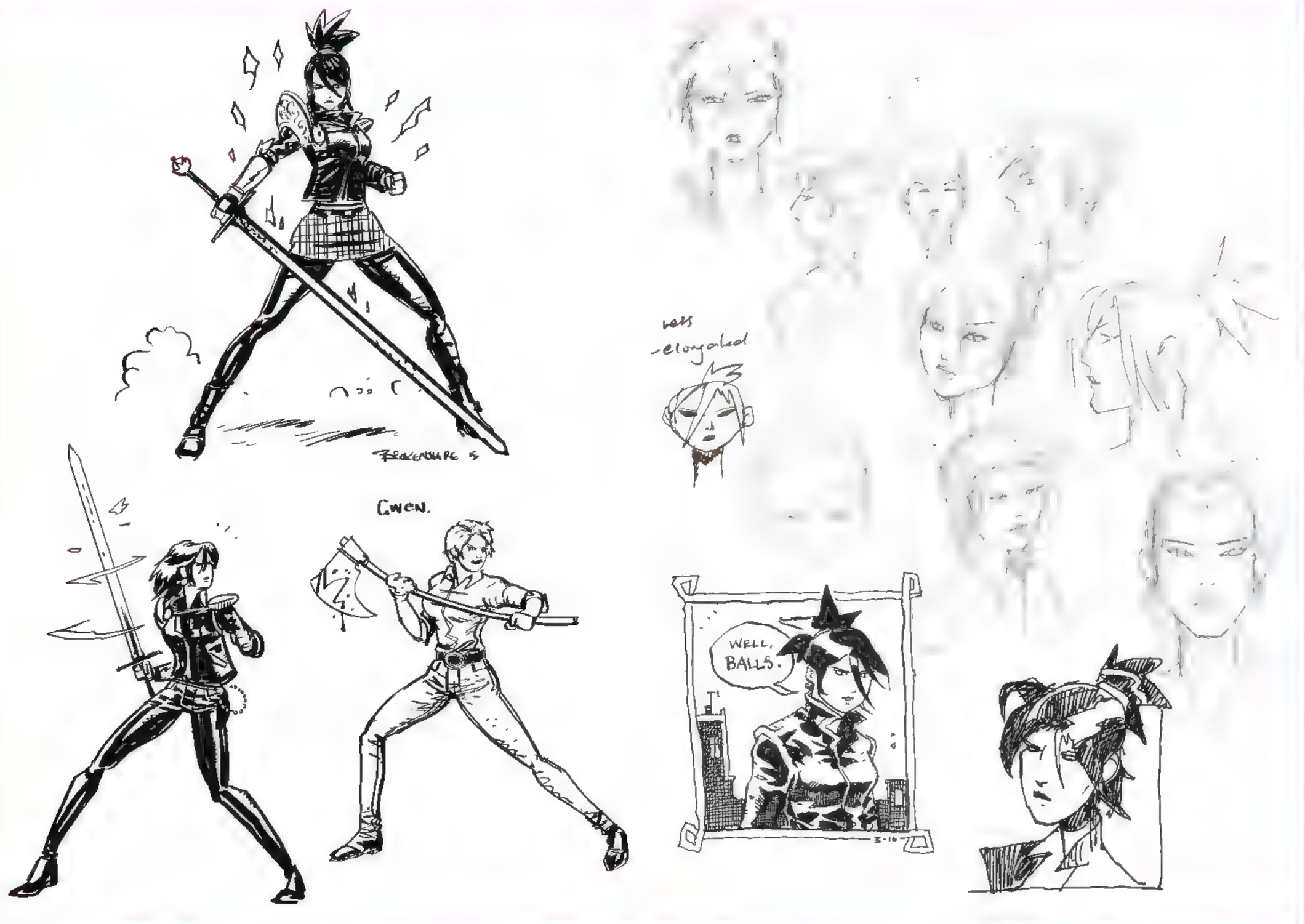
WHATEVER HAPPENS, WE'LL DEAL WITH IT, YEAH?
IT'S WHAT WE DO, RIGHT, RANI?
YEP. TOGETHER.

IT BEGINS!

the once and future QUEEN

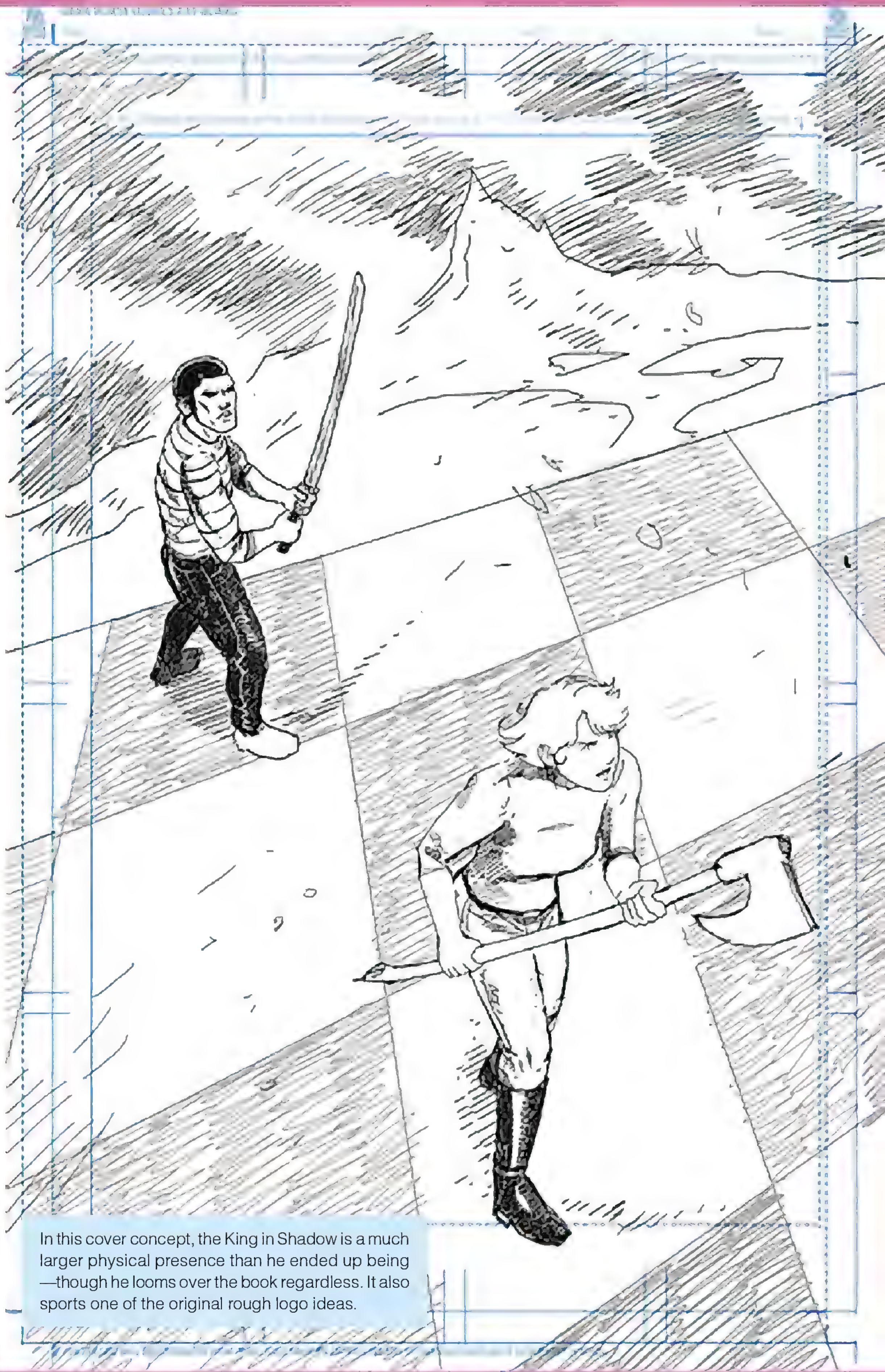
EXTRAS

NOTES BY
Adam, D.J., and Nick

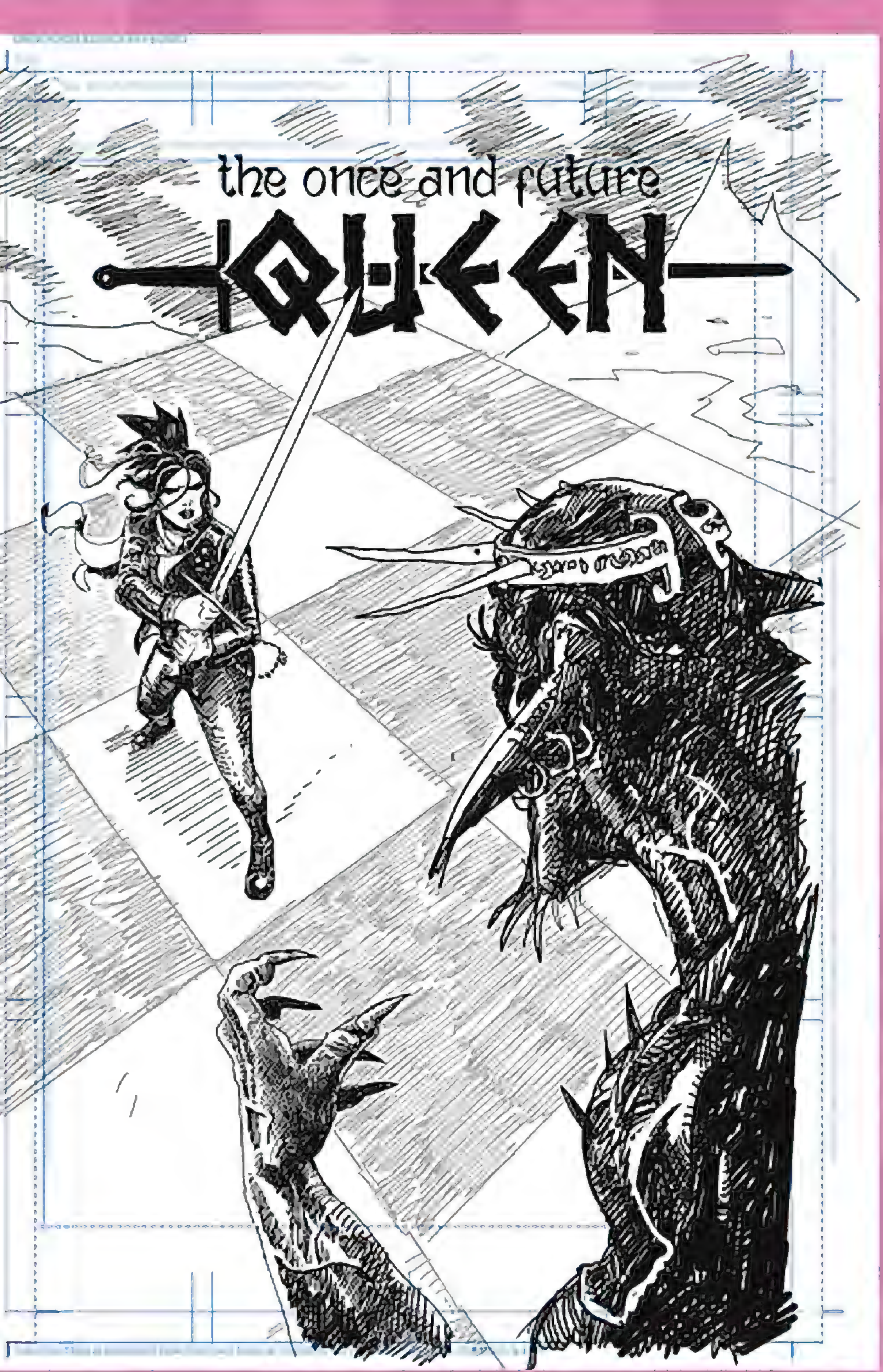


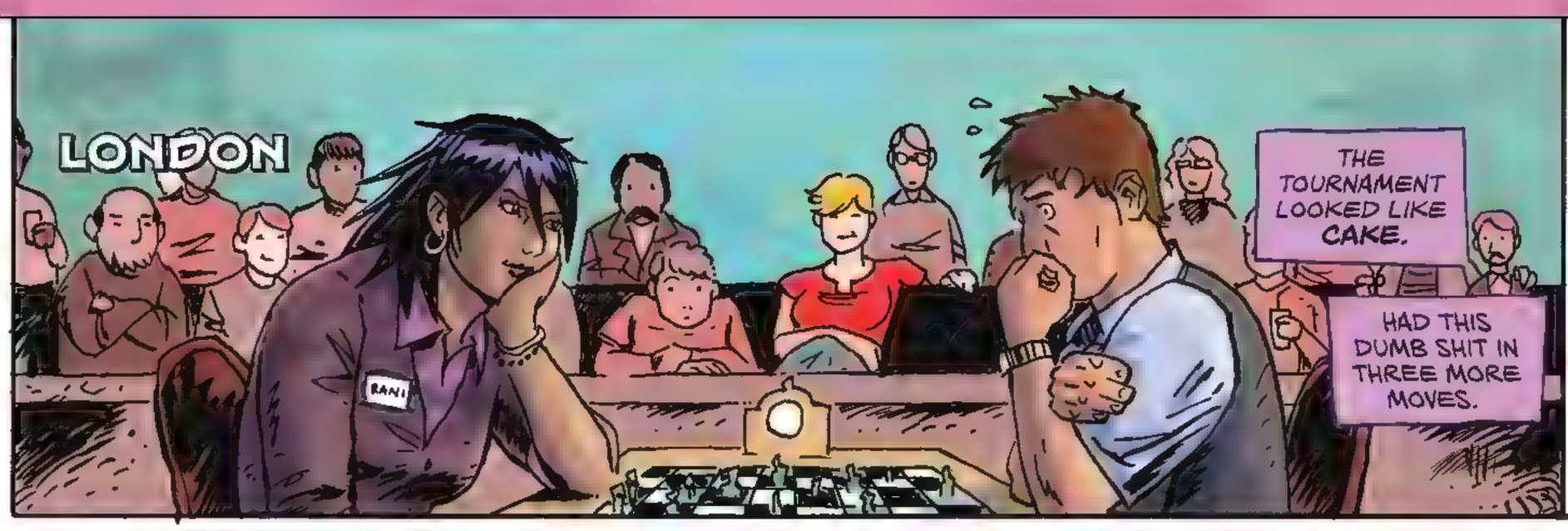
The previous page is the pitch cover featuring Frank's original logo, with the flag behind it based on old pulp novels. We moved away from that banner look for a cleaner logo space. On this page we have Nick's early takes on Rani (with a hint of Gwen). He had an instant feel for the character. The hair as crown idea and the punk/armor look were keys that helped us all unlock our hero's potential. Nick does endless tests and studies for lead characters, sharing them so we can hone in on look and personality.

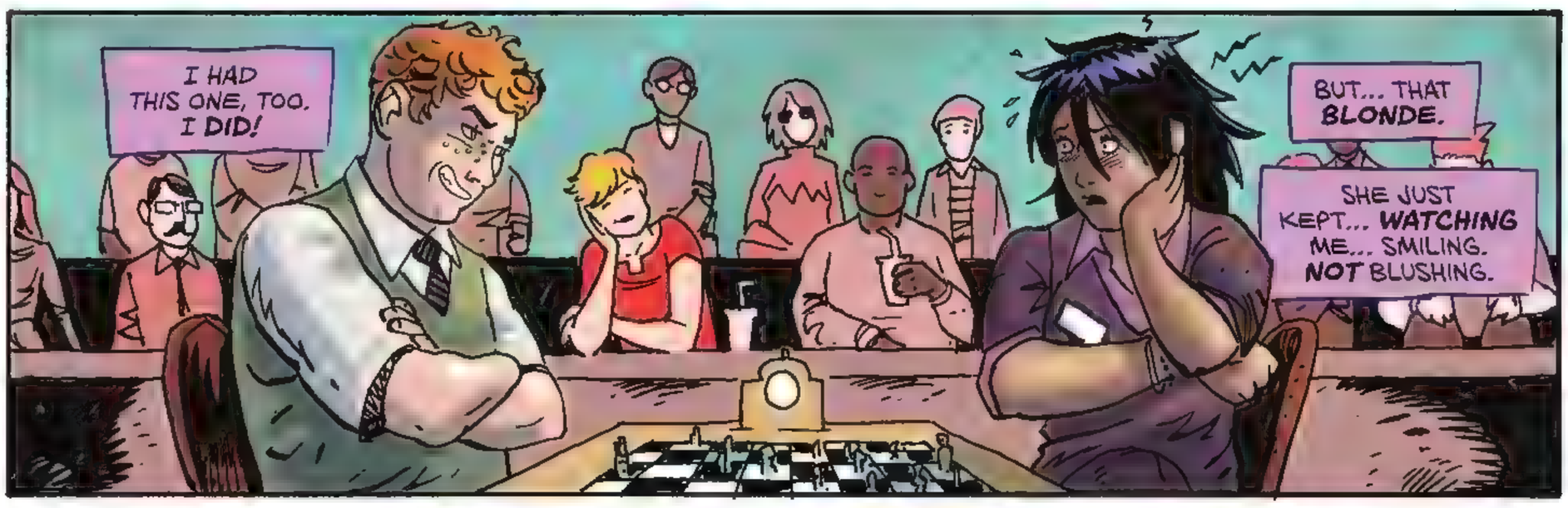
Nick also creates small cartoons to get a feel for things. In addition to more standard character design pages, he sometimes creates these "mood" collages in the looser style he often employs in his sketchbooks. Some of the characters presented here look pretty familiar, like Rani and this earlier version of "Spaceman Merlin." As for the knife-wielding girl in the lower left, the worried fella, the dark Fae, and the dragon, well, only Nick knows who they are—for now, at least.

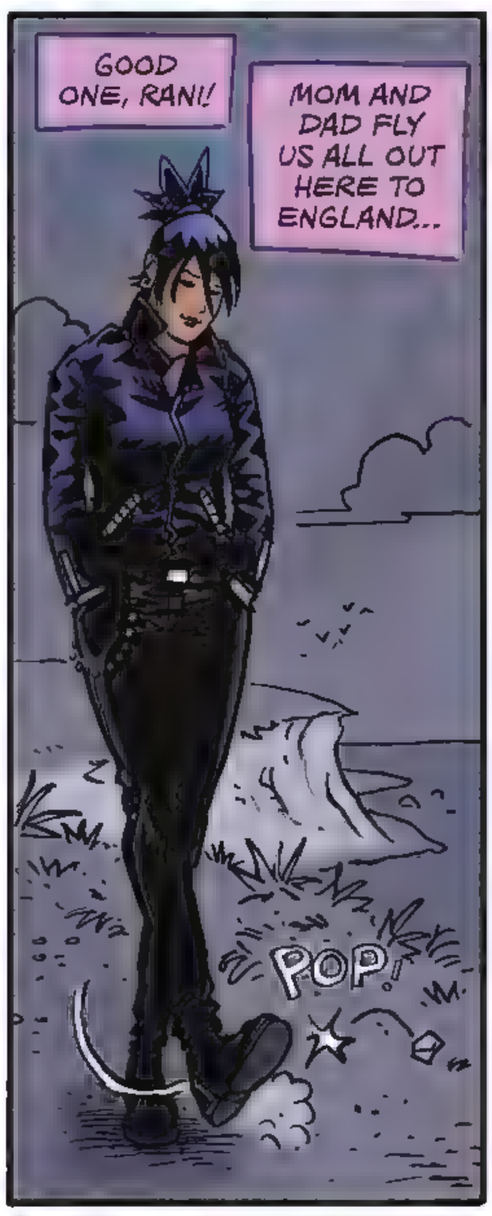


In this cover concept, the King in Shadow is a much larger physical presence than he ended up being —though he looms over the book regardless. It also sports one of the original rough logo ideas.


the once and future
QUEEN







We did the comic section of our pitch differently than usual. Normally we use select pages from the script, if not a full issue. With *Queen*, we made a mini-comic to show the complete story in brief. Doing it this way helped us refine scenes later in the actual book.

This also meant every scene had to be condensed, so pulling Excalibur from the stone didn't get the full scope it eventually would. We also had to skimp on character intros for speed's sake.

Note Merlin's blue glow. The green in the book isn't just for artistic reasons, but is also a future story secret. Also, Fae needed a different color palette than Earth. Here it's more saturated, whereas Nick's final color choices in the book ended up more impressionistic.

These final pages are where the biggest differences with the finished volume are found. Rani never armors up as much as seen here, though she looks cool. Also, Morgan's original Fae form is far more unsettlingly creepy/cute than the monstrous version Nick ultimately used.

The end of this volume isn't the same as the fight seen here. This was more of a long journey's end, not the first big clash of a war. Lance never got to wear his sweet scarf, and Gwen is much more bloodthirsty. Yikes.

the once and future QUEEN™

Magic, romance, adventure, and excitement come together in this tale as old myths reveal themselves to be fake, and new ones cause trouble for everyone!

Rani Arturus is a chess prodigy with no plans to be a leader of any sort, let alone QUEEN. After she pulls the legendary sword Excalibur from the stone . . . well, no backsies. Now she must form a new Round Table made of friends and family to protect the Earth from an invasion of Fae, who'd like a new planet to call their own.

"A modern reinvention of the Arthurian legend, *The Once and Future Queen* has a lot going for it. It's a beautiful book, pairing distinctly modern trappings with an almost retro color palette. It's also the rare book that manages to be as fresh as it is familiar."

—IGN

"This is a home run, no doubt. It has all the humor, heart, and excitement you'd expect from this team and then some. If you like swords, magic, and knights, you'll freaking love this comic book."

—NERDIST

SON OF ULTRON